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To Make A Difference



The Boston Community Schools

By Lee Warren • Photographs by Doug Clifford

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Special Thanks	

Raymond L. Flynn, Mayor
Lawrence Dwyer, Director

*Designed by Norman Law
Printed by Graphic House, Inc.*

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The Wealth of Cities by Jonathan Kozol

The other side of anguish in a modern city is the strength born of the spirit of community.

In 1972, that strength was captured and embodied in a concept that survives today. The Community Schools were brought forth in Boston as an outgrowth of a decade of communal activism. Funded with high hopes by City Hall, the schools fulfilled the expectations of their founders but were temporary victims of the fiscal cutbacks of the decade's end. Twelve years since their founding, they are in good health once more: a tribute to the vision of a city, which, like others, has known anguish and injustice but, unlike many others, has been wise enough to look for its salvation to its people.

The Community Schools do not compete with ordinary public schools but have made use of their classrooms and resources to create a parallel structure of instruction that serves people of all ages, from adult nonreaders in their sixties to their four-year-old grandchildren — and a full range of the age-groups in between.

I have visited many of these schools, talked with gifted teachers and exciting students and extraordinary organizers. All of these people are described in detail, many in their own words, in the book that follows. I will not repeat the details here. Certain moments, certain people, nonetheless stick in my mind:

A woman in Allston. She devotes twelve hours daily to her job as the director of the Jackson-Mann — a school that serves a polyglot community of recent immigrants from thirty different nations, most of them still lacking fluency in English.

A young man at the Condon School next to the D Street Project in South Boston. He grew up in the neighborhood. He knew the streets. He knew the suffering. Today he is director of the school that serves this poor white neighborhood — but one that also serves an ethnic mix of black, Hispanic, Asian people who arrive here nightly from adjacent neighborhoods a mile or two away.

A marvelous teacher in Jamaica Plain. A patient and ingenious man, his name is Carey Reid. His name and face stay in my mind because he does the work that interests me the

most. He teaches the illiterate to write and read. I watch him working and, although I differ with him on at least a dozen points of pedagogic theory, all of those differences evaporate as I observe the energy and decency he brings into this job. After class, I join him for a beer. We talk for hours. Today, a year and more since we first met, I think of him again. If, as it is said, a city will be spared because of one good woman or good man, then I am convinced that person must be Carey Reid.

Happily for Boston, none of this depends upon a single person. The whole is greater than its parts, and the community is stronger even than the sum of all its boldest innovators.

The wealth of cities, in the long run, does not rest within its banks or highrise buildings but within the spirits of its people. Boston has those banks and buildings too, and beautiful restorations, elegant plazas, shops and restaurants for tourists to admire and enjoy. The part the tourists do not see is far less elegant, but infinitely more important. Boston has its poverty, its racial fears, and its outrageous and intolerable griefs. Only the romantic or the very rich could possibly deny this. But the city also has a wealth that cannot be identified with dollars. It is the wealth of ordinary people joining hands and linking arms to face the odds together. They learn and teach, suffer and fear, struggle and (at least occasionally) prevail. The Community Schools at length embody something more than buildings, teachers, courses of instruction. They are, at last, no less than a community of conscience.

A bright light in a dark age, a cheerful beacon in a period of often brutal disregard, they represent a signal to the nation that communities can save their souls by shared endeavors growing from the grass roots and governed by the leaders of the neighborhoods themselves.

Many good ideas have come and gone within this country in the years since 1972. Too frequently, the cost-efficient experts will allow the best ideas to disappear the soonest. The Community Schools have managed to survive the worst of times. They deserve redoubled and quadrupled backing in the years ahead. A wise society will not allow this dream to die.

Acknowledgments

In the course of this project, I have spent many hours with community schools staff, as I have moved from school to school, talking, listening, observing. I found them to be an extraordinary group of people—tough, caring, intelligent, committed. They were in every case more than generous with their time and their stories, willing to talk freely and for long stretches of time about their programs, their schools, themselves. Many thanks to all of them.

I particularly want to thank those I didn't get to talk with, for what I hope will be their generosity in understanding that it was impossible to meet with everyone and their willingness to accept this as their story too.

I also spent a considerable amount of time talking with people who surround and participate in the community schools program: students, Council members, former Council members, volunteers, and aides. As with the staff, I was impressed over and over again by their generosity and their enthusiasm for the program. Many thanks to:

Lou Albert, David Basil, Ray Bennett, Joe Beth, Kay Brown, Patricia Brown, Steve Brown, Michele Connolly, Mary Cover, Claudia De Muccio, Carolyn Driscoll, Olga Dumott, Tako Duncan, Ray Flynn, Dottie Fontes, Anne M. Gawin, Diane Gerald, Dave Gorman, Martha Henry, Sandy Hurley, Barbara Inzodda, Morris Lane, Rita Larson, Polly Lui, Jeanne McDonnell, Sheril Mellan, Ezra Merrill, Max Mills, Yvonne Moschella, Mon O'Shea, Evelyn Pattne, Thelma Peters, Anna Poor, Phyllis Reddick, Edward Reeves, Joanne Santos, Ken Sinkiewicz, Zona Terrell, John Thomas, Mark W. Urquhart, Diane Walker, Sheila Whitley, Gregory Williams (Koala).

Special thanks to Ezra Merrill, Executive Director of Careers For Later Years, Inc., whose idea this book is; to the Boston Committee, the Korda Foundation, and the Boston Community Schools Program, who made it possible; and to Jules Slavet, Community Schools Program Developer, who coordinated it and provided editorial assistance.

In addition to my admiration for his photography, I am deeply grateful to my collaborator, Doug Clifford, for his sensitive reading of this text, and for his comments, which were always exactly right. Without them, I dread to think how this might have turned out.

Finally, my profound thanks to Richard Warren, for his patient and steady technical support, and to Carly Warren, for her tolerance, humor, and gracious support throughout this endeavor. Without their help, this book would never be.

Milestones

1968	Dorchester Council for Community Schools formed. Advocates for community access to new school buildings.	May 1980	City Council votes unanimously not to consider the Mayor's budget without funding for Community Schools Program.
September 1970, January 1972	Lee and Marshall Community Schools begin programs under auspices of the Parks and Recreation Department (first non-School Department community oriented recreation programs).	June 1980	Full funding restored to Community Schools Program.
October 1972	Mayor White submits ordinance to City Council authorizing creation of Boston Community Schools Program.	September 1980	Mayor cuts Community Schools Program budget by 43%.
November 1972	Ordinance creating Community Schools Program passes City Council, 5 to 4. Community Schools established as part of City government, under the Public Facilities Commission, independent of the School Department.	December 1980	Staff Christmas party held at 182 Tremont Street. Decision reached to publicly confront the Administration.
June 1974	<i>Plan of Operations</i> developed by city-wide advisory committee. Shares operational authority with local community school councils. Signed by Mayor White.	January 1981	Committee to Preserve Community Schools leads effort to block revenue bonding package and upper-level pay raise package submitted by Mayor White to City Council.
July 1973	"Kalus Decision:" Superior Court affirms legality of ordinance creating the Community Schools Program in response to suit brought by the Boston School Committee.		Compromise reached between Mayor White and City Council on supplemental appropriation for Community Schools Program.
1976	Public Facilities Commission assigns Community Schools to the Mayor's Office, creating the Mayor's Office of Community Schools.	May 1981	Public Facilities Commission votes to reassume responsibility for Community Schools Program and provides substantial financial support enabling Community Schools Program to continue operations.
April 1978	G.E.D. Certificate testing brought to neighborhoods. Community Schools Program authorized by state to administer GED testing. The first testing outside Department of Education facilities.	July 1981	Community Schools Program structure reorganized, moving from a neighborhood-based to a regional administrative structure in response to budget cuts.
November 1977	Community Schools Program constituents mobilize to prevent proposed budget reductions.	1982-1983	Significant increase in programming through acquisition of federal, state, and private dollars.
1980	Preliminary City budget submission for fiscal year 1984 does not include funds for Community Schools Program.	September 1982	Over six hundred people gather at City Hall to celebrate the beginning of the second decade of the Community Schools Program.
		1983	Boston's commitment to Community Schools Program becomes visible campaign issue in both City Council and Mayoral elections.
		1984	Mayor Flynn and the City Council affirm commitment to Community Schools Program by increasing budget by 32% during time of municipal fiscal constraints.



Chapter I.

Who Are The Community Schools?

What

When I went to visit the Jackson/Mann Community School one day in early June, the seniors' lunch was being set up. Ann and Patrick, two senior volunteers who help serve the lunch, came over and joked with Sue Mechan (Program Developer) as she and I talked in the art room. The art room was filled with supplies and work in progress—there was a room filled with hundreds of ceramics figures next door—and Pam Quinn, an art teacher, was there getting things ready for one of her classes. We were talking in the art room because it was the quietest place around: the community school office, for example, was crowded with desks and women, talking, laughing, eating, answering the phones.

It was cheese day and the Jackson/Mann was distributing federal cheese, butter, and powdered milk. Lines formed in the hot sun outdoors, hundreds of people, mostly older, mostly Russian. When the time came, they entered in single file, quietly, were checked off and waved their cards to the staff, who put the five pound blocks of cheese and the two pound blocks of butter into their opened carryalls. The line proceeded steadily, at the expense of tremendous activity by a number of staff people from all programs at the community school, who managed to move a regular supply of the heavy cheese and butter from the storeroom to the desk for several hours. With all this work, they still had the energy and compassion to sympathize with and help an older woman who was short of breath and needed to sit down.

The seniors had their lunch. Later, in a small office adjoining that room, I talked with Barbara Neumann, Director of the Adult Education Program, after she had finished her planning meeting with the teachers in the program. All this was going on next to the hall where the cheese was being distributed.

Upstairs, children began to arrive for the After-school Program. When I wandered in, two boys were playing chess, a small group was fooling around in a corner, and Mary Beth Callahan, head teacher, was waiting for the others to arrive. The pre-school group that day was off on a field trip, so I missed them.

I talked with Janice Hamilton, Program Supervisor, out in the main hall—again because there was a free desk—and in an auditorium across the way a theater group was rehearsing a play they were going to perform that night for Allston-Brighton residents.

Only my time with Pat Brainard, Coordinator, was uninterrupted—mostly. One or two people did drop in with a quick comment or question, and I was conscious of the phones and of work to be done in this busy woman's office.



All this occurred during three or four hours at one school. And I may have missed something; I didn't, for example, visit the gym, where teens are likely to have been playing basketball after school. As this visit indicates, the community schools serve a lot of people, of all ages, through a lot of different programs. Altogether, the community schools provide educational, recreational, and social programming for 30,000 people each year—Bostonians of all ages, races, and classes:

- In the past five years, the community schools have enabled 5000 adults to attain their GED (high school diploma).
- During 1984, six community schools—the Harborside, Mattahunt, Jackson/Mann, Charlestown/Kent, Quincy, and Jamaica Plain—served over 600 adults in Adult Basic Education and the External Diploma Program.

- For the past 5 years, the City Roots Alternative Education Program has helped over 100 high school drop-outs each year get a GED and a job. In 1984-85, two program sites will be added to the original three.
- During 1984, the community schools provided 1000 of Boston's immigrants and refugees with training in English as a Second Language.
- 200 children are provided with remedial and enrichment reading and language arts instruction each year through after school reading programs.
- 500 families are served each year in pre-school and after school day care programs, enabling mothers to work or receive job training.
- 3000 senior citizens are regularly served, through senior clubs, activities, special trips, and lunch programs.
- The community schools counseling program helps 500 people each year to cope with poverty, housing problems, joblessness, and family stress.
- Summer is for kids: summer camp and other programs serve 16,000 kids each year and employ 500 teenagers as camp counselors and aides. At 37 neighborhood sites, the Boston community schools serve a total of 60,000 meals to disadvantaged children during the summer.
- In addition to their own programs, the community schools make themselves available for community programs: AA, Girl Scouts, distributions of federal cheese and butter, community meetings.

What this all means is that the community schools are busy places where numerous activities are happening simultaneously. Seniors eat lunch in the room used earlier by Montessori pre-schoolers at the Condon, for example, providing a handy metaphor for the impressive range of programs run by the community schools. At the Agassiz one afternoon, teen-aged boys play basketball in the gym, while little girls take ballet, some elementary school children work and play in their after school reading group and others paint gardens downstairs. Line dancing for seniors, swimming in the pool, aerobic exercises, and GED testing all go on one evening at the Murphy Community School, as two women work quietly into the night planning a summer camp program for a predominantly black group in their predominantly white neighborhood. Entering the community schools, I sense energy and activity, committed people working long and often backbreaking hours to make happen what nobody thought could happen.



Where

In a city of neighborhoods, the community schools are where the people are. Their programs happen in the neighborhoods they serve.

In a unique arrangement, the Community Schools share twenty public school buildings, all built since 1971, with the Boston Public Schools. These buildings are modern, well-lit places with exceptional recreational facilities: pools, gyms, exercise and weight-rooms. They include classrooms, space for child care and arts and craft activities, and theaters.

The community schools occupy other neighborhood facilities, such as Curtis Hall in Jamaica Plain, the Upham's Corner Municipal Building in Dorchester, and the Orient Heights Recreation Center in East Boston. And the community schools take their programs to yet other places in the city. The Adult Basic Education and External Diploma Programs, for example, are taught both in local community schools and in neighborhood housing projects and churches in Allston-Brighton and in East Boston.

Mostly, the community schools are accessible. They are local and they are for the most part easy to get to by public transportation. Some even provide transportation for participants—for children in the after school programs, for example, or for seniors, or for people taking ESL classes at night.

As part of Boston's neighborhoods, the community schools are just as various as the neighborhoods themselves. Outside the Blackstone, for example, signs are in Spanish as well as English, a man pushes a cart with fruit drinks found in Latin countries, a fruit truck sells pineapples and bananas. The Condon is a place to go—a modern building set in the old, almost treeless, black-topped D Street Project in South Boston. At the Quincy, colorful flags brighten the hallways, and notices are in both Chinese and English. The Jamaica Plain Community School is isolated in the vast wastelands of the Southwest Corridor construction project. Curtis Hall, only a few blocks away, is an elegant, high-ceilinged brick and grey stone building. The Ohrenberger is surrounded by fields and woods, as is the Mattahunt; the Harborside by dense city streets and the harbor, inaccessible but beautiful. They're all different, but they're all right there, where the people are.

Who

"The people are the program."

This statement—the community schools' slogan since the program first began—gets at what the community schools are really all about: doing for people what people want done; empowering people; uniting people.

The people are the people of Boston. They are the neighborhood folks who use the community schools. They are the boys and girls who come after school, the seniors who line dance and eat lunch and go on trips, the teens who play basketball, the men and women who need a high school diploma or the English language or, simply, some exercise. They are refugees and immigrants, single mothers, widows, toddlers, families—whole families use the community schools' various programs. They are black, white, Hispanic, Chinese, Russian, Lebanese, Thai....

The people are the Council members, neighbors who volunteer their time to plan and oversee the community school in their own neighborhood. These people are responsible for their community school: they hire staff and decide what programs their neighborhood needs and wants. Council members are neighbors, concerned citizens, people who believe in their own empowerment and are willing to work hard for it.

The people are the staff, and they are what make the whole thing work. They work in the local community schools and in the Central Office, running the programs the Councils have decided upon. They are diverse, dedicated, tough, and most have managed to maintain a good sense of humor in the midst of the confusion inherent in any grassroots community organization.

These people, like the people they serve, are black and white and Hispanic and Asian. They are representative of the neighborhoods they live and work in, and they are deeply committed to the community schools. They work remarkably hard—often 60 hours a week—and they last remarkably long in situations where burn-out seems inevitable.

Why

Boston is a great place. It's among the top cities in the country—in the world—for music, art, medicine, law, science, higher education, business development. Boston's history is central to the country's history and is highly visible; Faneuil Hall Marketplace is noted throughout the country as a model for urban redevelopment; Boston's high tech industry is revolutionizing the workplace.

And Boston is a size which makes these strengths accessible. It's large enough to have them, small enough that they can be known and enjoyed.

But Boston, like all urban centers, is loaded with problems—most of them common to all big cities, some unique. And the problems confront a significant proportion of Boston's residents; many of the middle and upper middle classes who enjoy Boston's riches live in the suburbs.

The statistics are impressive.

- Nearly a third (31.6%) of Bostonians over 25 do not have a high school diploma. The percentage is higher for minorities. Many of these people, over 100,000, are functionally illiterate,[#] which means that they cannot read a want ad, fill out a job application, or perform simple computational tasks.
- Of those who enter the Boston Public high schools as freshmen, 47% drop out before completing their diplomas.[*]
- Almost one in five of Boston's citizens was born outside the U.S. and Canada. 13% now come from Hispanic countries, Asia, and the Middle East. These immigrants and refugees are unevenly bunched throughout the city.[+]
- 17% of Boston's adults live in households in which English is not the language usually spoken at home. In some communities, such as the South End and Central Boston, the figure goes as high as 35%.[+]

Jamaica Plain

by Lynel Horne

Bored

No action

no playgrounds, nothing for young kids to do.

Nothing for grown-ups to do but to go to the bar.

Slowest trolley in Boston.

Hip kids, quiet kids, depressed kids they've got the beat.

Boring.

Broken glass, trash, abandoned buildings, Can I have a dime, Miss?

Pass it on the Arborway, the orange line,

Dudley to Green Street, Washington Street, Under the high tracks, shacks and an empty line, lives left behind.

- One in ten residents is over 65, though that figure reaches as high as 25% in West Roxbury; a third are 19 and under, school-aged; and one in five is a teen-ager, between the ages of 10 and 19.[+]
- Roughly one quarter of Boston's families can barely make ends meet.[+] In 1978, 36% earned under \$10,000 a year, 71% under \$20,000.[+] Predictably, wealth and poverty are unevenly distributed around the city.[+]
- 10% of Boston's residents live in public housing[*]: 6% of whites (who nonetheless compose 42% of all residents of subsidized housing), 20% of blacks, 14% of Hispanics, 3% of orientals.[+]

* **The Boston Globe**, 6/24/84 and 7/25/84

+ **Boston and its Neighborhoods**, published by the Boston Redevelopment Authority in May, 1982

+ U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Money Income of Families and Persons in the United States: 1978," **Current Population Reports**, Series P-60, no. 123 (June 1980), Table 19, as reprinted in **Boston and its Neighborhoods**, p. II-2

Diane Halperin, Boston Neighborhood Development and Employment Agency

These powerful statistics illustrate one of the most important reasons the community schools exist: to provide services, survival skills in some cases, to people in need. To the single mother on AFDC with three kids and no other adult around and no way to get out of the house. To the man who was a lawyer and biology teacher in China, but who now, without English, is a dishwasher. To the kids with no place to go, nothing to do, and not much to look forward to. To the parent trying to support a family without a high school diploma.

The community schools also exist to provide both leisure and enrichment services to people in the city's neighborhoods who want them. To families who want to go for a swim on a hot summer evening. To the eighty year old man who decides to take up painting. To the woman who wants to take a writing course after all those years of child rearing. To the child who wants to take ballet, or gymnastics, or play basketball.

Need and want meet in the Boston Community Schools Program. A grassroots organization, its mission is to meet big city needs, to provide services identified by the neighborhoods, in the neighborhoods, and to empower people.

As Dot Gorman, Acting Coordinator at the Ohrenberger, says: "It makes a difference in the quality of life."

How

The government of the City of Boston makes this happen, through a cooperative partnership with the neighborhoods. The City supplies money for salaries, facilities and maintenance, and technical assistance; the neighborhoods, through their Councils, determine their own needs, decide what programs they want to run, and hire staff to run them. This combination of City resources and local decision-making both lowers costs (local volunteers do a lot of the work) and increases the program's effectiveness in the community.

The total budget for the community schools for fiscal 1984 is \$3.484 million, of which the City has contributed \$1.126 million. The rest has been raised by the community schools individually and by the Central Office for particular programs, from public and private sources. City funds are divided among the schools, and each school sets its own fee structures. Some,

depending on the neighborhood served, charge more for a membership or for specific programs, than others. Summer camp at the Condon, for example, costs \$5 for the summer; at West Roxbury, the fee is \$70 for two weeks. Membership fees are generally \$2 or \$3 for an adult, less for kids and seniors.

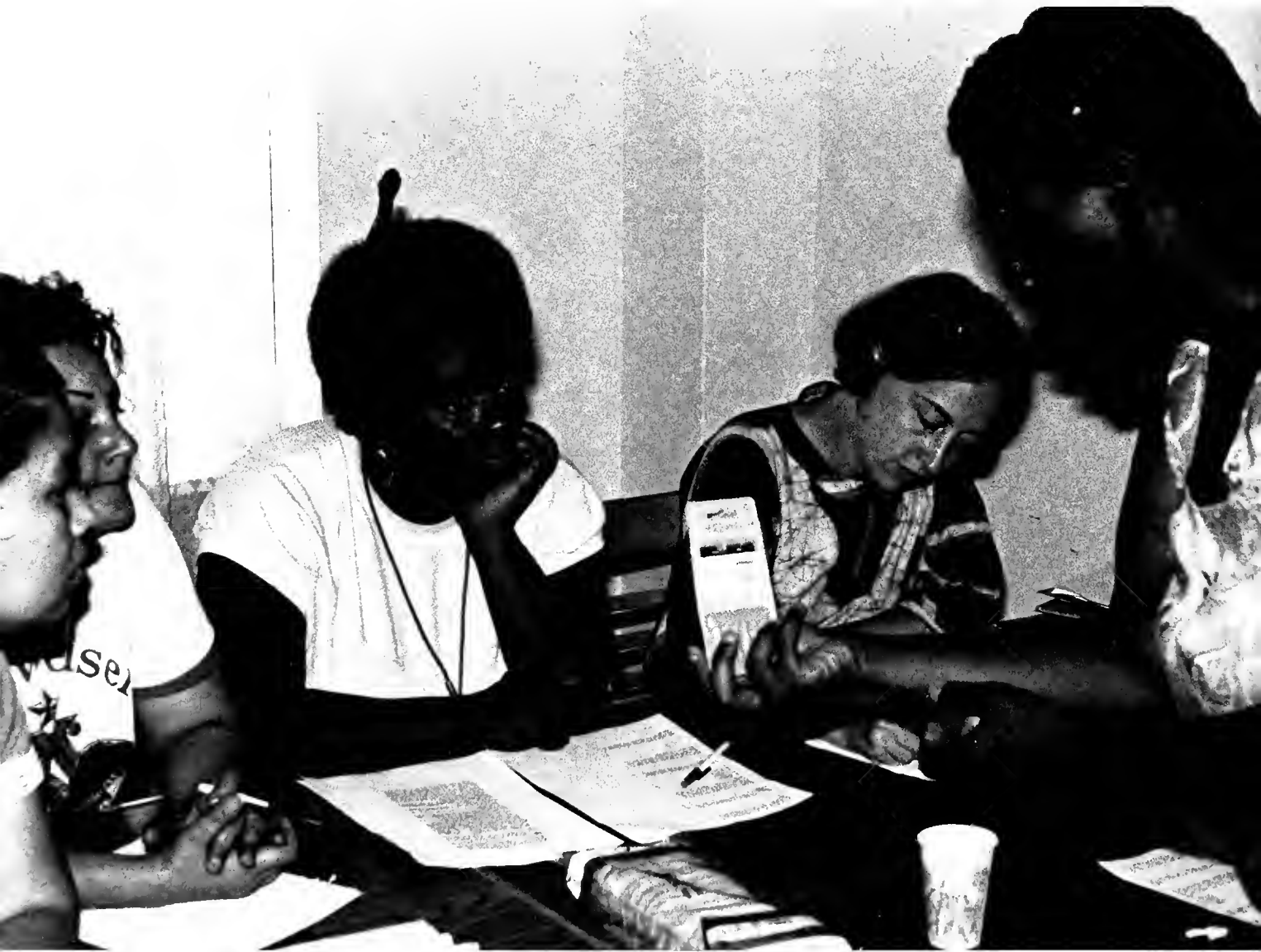
The community schools also work collaboratively with other local agencies. In South Boston, for example, the summer camp program is a collaborative arrangement of the Condon and the Tynan Community Schools, the South Boston Neighborhood House, and the South Boston Boys and Girls Club. Boston's Parks and Recreation Department's Camp Joy for the handicapped is housed in several of the community schools. AA and Al Anon meet at most of the community schools.

When

The Boston Community Schools program has been in operation since 1972.

In the twelve years since its opening, the program has gone through a number of changes. It started with three schools and a program for juvenile delinquents. There are now twenty schools, offering a wide variety of programs. In the early 1980's, their funding was severely cut—in one year from \$1.8 million down to \$540 thousand. But the community schools survived, through sheer grit, and they are now on an upswing again. Their budget is increasing and new sources of funding have been found to solidify old programs and develop new ones.

The community schools are here to stay.



Chapter II.

Learning For Life

"We started a GED (high school diploma) preparation program on a shoestring. We discovered that out of fifteen to twenty people, only five were ready for the GED exam. We discovered illiteracy in our community.

"We had 10-week GED preparation sessions and said the students could stay 20 weeks if they needed it. Many needed two to three years. We found out they need pre-GED classes.

"In our ESL (English as a Second Language) classes, the teacher had problems with the folks in the class, because they were illiterate in French, their own language.

"Therefore, we started a basic education program."

The story is not unusual. Throughout Boston, people in the community schools have discovered illiteracy and the debilitating lack of high school diplomas recorded in the statistics in the last chapter. In Jamaica Plain, a neighborhood assessment shows that in three developments—Bromley-Heath, Archdale, and South Street—60% of the residents have no diplomas. Many Hispanics in that neighborhood don't have enough English even to travel into downtown Boston to find a job. In East Boston, 44% of the adults have no high school diploma. The Workplans of most community schools note the desperate need for literacy and for diplomas. Lack of these all too often contributes to poverty, unemployment, or dead-end jobs, and to all the problems that attend such situations.

The community schools are doing something about this need for literacy and for diplomas—in fact, many things. They hold GED preparation classes to enable people to get a high school diploma, and since 1978 have been certified as GED testing centers. At most community schools, the test is given three to four times a year, providing people with a frequent and easily accessible opportunity to get that diploma. Each year, some 1000 adults pass the GED exam at the community schools.

The community schools have developed Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs which train people in basic literacy—in reading, writing, and computational skills. Some have programs for people who need work before

entering the Adult Basic Education program—often private, one-on-one instruction in the basic rudiments of reading and arithmetic. Some have programs for people who have graduated from high school, but are reading at a third grade level.

The community schools are participating in Boston's External Diploma Program (EDP), which gives people a Boston high school diploma after they have mastered significant skills and completed a number of research tasks, oriented toward life skills.

They maintain extensive programs in English as a Second Language (ESL).

And they provide college courses on site, mostly offered with Bunker Hill Community College and the University of Massachusetts at Boston.

Adult Education is a major priority for Boston's community schools. They have gone after and received extensive funding for this purpose. In 1983, six of the community schools—the Mattahunt, Harborside, Jackson/Mann, Jamaica Plain, Charlestown/Kent, and Quincy—were among the fourteen sites funded by the Neighborhood Development and Employment Agency for an extensive Adult Literacy Project.

All of these programs have features in common. All are competency (or skills) based. Most are well integrated, so that students can move smoothly from one level to the next, from competency in ESL through Basic Ed to the EDP. All, in one way or another, are functional or life-oriented. That is, their curricula focus on skills that people use in daily life: comparison shopping, first aid, filling out job applications, understanding worker benefits, identifying community resources, identifying personal values and goals. These are in addition to and interwoven into lessons in the more traditional arithmetic and grammar skills. It means that what people are learning is related to what they need to know as functioning, self-reliant adults in Boston.

The lists of competencies are at first glance intimidating—there are 72 in East Boston's ABE program, for example—but most people are already skilled in a number of them when they enter the program. Quickly checking competencies off is an important, and intended, morale booster for people who come with little confidence in their academic ability. Generally, students contract to work on eight or ten competencies at a time, rather than tackling the whole list at once.

The people running these programs differ at times about the best way to approach adult education. Their programs are as different as their neighborhoods and their philosophies. What impressed me most about these people, however, both individually and as a group, was their consistently deep level of engagement in education. These educators care a lot that adults be educated, and that they be educated in ways that will work positively for them. They may disagree at some points about what is the best method or process, but they are all firmly committed to their work and to the people they serve. For all their differences, these programs have a common integrity and an essential harmony throughout the city.

I walked into the large, well-lit, comfortable room at Jamaica Plain Community School. Some 15 or 20 people were working there that evening, some at tables by themselves, some in groups of three or four. They were equally men and women; they were black, Asian, Hispanic, white. Three teachers, with various areas of expertise, and a volunteer tutor were there that evening.

A Hispanic man in his mid-20's comes over to talk with Carey Reid, the Applied Science teacher, a novelist in his free time. Together they review the competency he is working on tonight. Carey goes through his folder with him and helps him decide what to work on next and how to do it. The man returns to his table to work.

I sit down at a table where three people are working with a volunteer tutor, Anna Poor. Two young women, one Asian, one Hispanic, and an older Haitian man are working as a group on word order in English sentences. On their sheets of paper are sentences with jumbled words:

*tipped people and boat shore to the over
the swam
street she the across walked.*

They struggle with various degrees of fluency to put these words into reasonable English sentences, quietly, with patience for each other's difficulties.

In one corner, two advanced ESL students are working with a tutor. At another table, three people are working on math individually. In a moment they begin to work together; Carey works through some explanations on the board. Later everyone gathers to hear a young man in the advanced ESL group give an oral presentation for one of his competencies. He has spent three weeks doing research on drug, alcohol, and cigarette abuse. He has made a brochure. He has prepared this speech. The others sit before him and listen helpfully.

Mostly, students here are working on advanced ESL or ABE. "Everyone in this room can speak English." The EDP, though an important goal for all the students, is not yet a large component of the program here, as many students begin at a 0-2 grade level. That is expected to change as students progress.

Down the hall, I visit the child care center. Children are playing there, at eight o'clock at night, while their parents struggle with the English language or with reading Massachusetts drivers' exams or with the math of local business applications, working toward literacy and, eventually, a diploma. Child care is free; without it, too many people would not be able to come. Transportation to and from the housing developments where most of the participants live is also free: the Community School is some distance from the projects, and without transportation, again too many people would not be able to come. Even the program is free.

It is easy to believe Dave Ziemba, Program Developer and chief proposal writer for this program, when he says, "Adult Education is JP's top goal."

Adult Education at the Jackson/Mann has focused on program delivery at two housing projects, Fidelis Way and Faneuil Street, although instruction is also available evenings at the Jackson/Mann. At the projects, classes run from 9-12 Monday through Thursday and, so far, mostly women attend them.

I talked for some time with Barbara Neumann, director of the program, in her office at the Jackson/Mann. Her deep engagement in developing

a curriculum which attends to the real needs of the specific women and men she is working with becomes increasingly evident. She is unwilling to use texts, unwilling, in fact, to buy into or even prepare any materials that will be used consistently for each new group of students.

"We get what is culturally interesting and what people enjoy. We play it by ear and adjust our methods and our materials to the individual."

In fact, the entire curriculum here is improvised, each ten-week session, for each new group of students. Small groups of students (of about eight) who study together determine their own subject matter. While working on common basic skills—reading, writing, computation—the group together decides what interests them. "I have some issues with saying that we will talk about 'life skills'," Barbara says. "It's partly a matter of vocabulary: 'life skills,' 'survival skills.' Most students have more sophisticated survival skills than we middle class people do. So we listen to concerns, are familiar with a range of resources, and set up a curriculum to deal with them. During week one of each session, we find out what the class wants to deal with. Each cycle is different."

"One of the merits of a competency-based program," she has written, "is that it implicitly locates the students in a position of control. S/he determines what is to be learned, and may carry that learning in many directions. A math class that began with the reading of a *Globe* article on the federal budget led to a discussion of how people arrive at personal budgets and what it means to be dependent on Welfare for money. The class then decided to rewrite the president's proposed federal budget, allocating money in the ways they considered best for our country. When the whole exercise was complete, people were amazed to see the sophistication of their own analysis and the complexity of the mathematical operations they had done."

I visited one of these classes at the Faneuil Housing Project. It was a summer workshop, between cycles, and the women in it had decided to focus on cooking and sewing, along with basic skills. Marty Duncan, their teacher, explained that already they had had three cooking lessons, in each of which one woman taught the others a recipe, including, in the case of a Chinese recipe, a full explanation of the ingredients and where to get them.

The women had to write out their recipes, a surprisingly difficult task in describing a procedure. They wrote stories about how they had learned to cook: "good story-telling came out of that." They read an article on the history of cooking that Marty had found. And they talked about measurements, and numbers of servings, calculating how much of each ingredient you would need for how many people.

"The idea grew to do a cookbook which everyone in the project will contribute to. Also growing out of this, the social worker is thinking of having an ethnic food festival at the project.

"We also plan to go to Radcliffe's Schlesinger Library, which has a big collection of cookbooks from all over the world and from the last century. People want to do that; we're not real informed about the cultural background of our cooking. We've lost touch."

The morning I visited, the class met in a small room in the Tenants' Office. The women brought children and a dog, all of whom were more or less effectively banished to another room, and Joanne began to show the other women how to make a skirt. "This is hard for me, because I know how to do it myself, but to explain it to someone else is hard."

It was hard, but good. "How do I start?" "From the beginning," advised Marty. And she did. She wrote on the board and demonstrated from her box of materials all of the things you need to make a skirt—a sewing machine, needles ("For this material, use the orange one; that's for light material"), cloth, buttons, the bobbin ("The bobbin is to help hold the top needle's stitch"), elastic ("All of this was 89 cents. It was on sale. It's cheap elastic, and good elastic. Elastic shrinks."), the width of the elastic—at which point a lesson emerged on how to read the eighths on a tape measure. Polly says that $\frac{6}{8}$ of an inch is the same as three quarters. Later in the class they read and talked about a passage from *The Color Purple* about making pants.

Thus, starting with an interest of the women in the class, Marty has put together a remarkably full curriculum that not only enriches her students' understanding of cooking, in one case, sewing in the other—their own topics—but also involves all of the basic skills.



Barbara Neumann also focuses on group instruction, even more than on individualized and self-paced learning—although they are also included, especially at the EDP level. She is interested in the larger social benefits of groups for shaky learners, despite their varying abilities. “I really believe, and experience has borne this out, that classes work better when people are at different levels. For example, group oral reading. People are hesitant at first but it’s the best technique for learning. They hear others while they look at the page and get an audio-visual hook-up. It is also morale boosting. People develop tremendous support; they teach each other.”

I saw evidence of that in the class I visited. Joanne had trouble with spelling, for example, and the other women were both quick to point out the mistakes and to help her correct them. Both the critical attention and the support were effective, Marty said. “She made real strides in self-esteem.”

And Shirley, “who dropped out of school in the seventh grade to raise six younger brothers and sisters, and always believed she wasn’t very smart, is radiant with the praise she receives from her classmates who see her as a genius. ‘For some reason, since I’ve been coming to this class, I’m starting to do everything else.’ i.e., get her learner’s permit, take a ceramics class, lose weight, research possibilities of studying design.”

Over at the Mattahunt, Wyola Garrett tells me “We’ve had folks come to us who can’t print their names, but you wouldn’t know it. They are well-dressed, well-spoken, have good cars. One woman said, ‘I can do no more than keep people from cheating me. This is the first program that doesn’t make me feel bad about that.’”

I spent some time talking with Vera Belton, a middle-aged woman who has “always been one to speak out for people” and who now gives one-on-one instruction four days a week in the morning to those not yet ready for Basic Education. One woman on AFDC, for example, was kicked out of her training course because she has no communications skills. She now comes to the Mattahunt for individualized instruction.

Vera tells me about one of her students: “I have one person with a fear of testing. She wants so much to learn. We have to build up her courage to take the pre-test. She has been so confused and trampled. She took the test elsewhere; they said she belonged nowhere in their program.

“Now 31, she has never been to school. She is determined to learn to read and write. She followed her grandfather’s instruction and got a dictionary to learn words. She believes nobody wants her. Schools keep closing when she goes there. This is her third school. She’s been here two months; she comes four days a week, four hours a day, and she stays longer. She’s making real progress.



"She says, 'I'll have to learn because my daughter will need help.' Now her daughter pitches in and helps her mother learn."

When Vera works with this woman and with her other students on reading and spelling, they start with books with two-word sentences. They go on to use pages from social studies books, with paragraphs to read and questions to answer. In math, they start with adding and subtracting, they learn multiplication tables, and they do percentages on clothes.

Vera Belton concludes, "I don't think of myself all day; at the end, I'm drained."

Vera's work is in addition to the more usual ABE and EDP work, which combines individual and group instruction. That is taught by Kareme Abdel-Shakur, a gentle man who is supportive and helpful with all levels of need.

"The people who attend this program are homeowners," Sherry Tucker Brown, education coordinator, and Shirley Campbell, instructor/counselor, tell me. "They have good cars, and are doing all right—except that they don't have a high school diploma. They have jobs, but they don't have a career. They're coming here for the career." Thus, one night a week is devoted to career counseling: peer support, resume writing, how to apply for a job.

"I have seen them come such a long way. They started out frustrated, afraid, talked about how they haven't been to school in twenty years. They need to celebrate their accomplishments."

"They come into the Occupational Literacy workshops so meek. They never think of talking to their supervisor to ask for a promotion or a change, never look at work as something they can be fulfilled by. The first five workshops change their self-image about their ability; it's a kind of assertiveness training for women. They get support from other women; I let them do most of the talking."

Jane Zimmerman is describing her Occupational Literacy Workshops, one of four closely linked programs in the Harborside's Adult Education program. Jane also meets with all 83 students in the programs for half an hour each month, to review their progress and their individual contracts with them.

Her workshops are one of the few examples of group learning in this program, where "all you need is a room, basically, and the books," as Eileen Chadis, its director, tells me. Students work at their own level with their own books at their own rate in a program which combines basic skills with life and occupational skills.

I visit the study room, where one teacher supervises the work of 15 people, most of whom stay around three hours. Beverly Startz, the teacher, tells me that the woman now leaving with her young daughter has a high school degree, but tested at the third grade level. She has been coming for four months now, and is up to the ninth grade. She is doing this so she can help her child. Being unable to do so "makes me look like a dummy."

Many mothers, I have noticed, come for this reason. Through this program, their self-esteem goes up, and their confidence to deal with anything. Barbara Neumann, at the Jackson/Mann, says that often people's goals change while they are in the program. They come in order to help their children; they leave talking about careers.



Harborlights

by MC Ramos

Evenings at my third-floor projects window, I'd watch the sun dip low 'til its reflection drowned in the grey of Chelsea Creek. Here at the cliff-hanging edge of East Boston, where planes soared by full of rich men bound for some sweet paradise, I felt forever left behind. Seagulls defied the meanest winds, wheeling 'cross the sky as free as I wished I could be.

This was a hard place to be a stranger. Who could stand the bitter chore of washing human spit off the face and hair of a beloved child? SPIK was on my mailbox, scrawled by some child with eyes as vacant as broken glass. Those who came to share my coffee and my time were likewise strangers, brought here by some accident of hard times or love turned mean. We'd talk about missing the sound of congas in the night, of wise grandmothers ever boiling pots of healing herbs and ancient secrets. We shared nostalgia for righteous accapella harmonies and men who danced for the sheer joy of it. Singing along with the radio, we'd either cry or make jokes out of all our pain. All the while, my baby Tania would rock herself to the rhythm of our words.

I was so full of unfinished business, feelings left out on the curb while demands of daily survival claimed precedence. My daughter, like an exquisitely tiny but broken doll, needed medication to keep breathing through the night. Sometimes it took a miracle to buy my son a new pair of sneakers and still put food on the table. Day by day, my cupboards began to fill and my little one grew stronger in her will to live. My son, with his gold-touched skin and Indian eyes, began to make his way amongst the people. Now it was time for me.

Harborside Community School had been the site of a human relations workshop I had attended, one that generated a march to Precinct Headquarters to demand protection for a Third World lady under threat. I smiled, remembering the astonished face of the captain when confronted with the righteous indignation of pastors, teachers, nuns and housewives! Now this "hotbed of revolution" was sending me a brochure. As I unfolded, the bold words, FICTION WRITER'S WORKSHOP leapt out at me. Here was a lost dream that could still come true. I strapped my daughter to my heart and hurried to enroll as fast as the 120 Bus could carry me.

That first evening on the way to class, people were astonished to see me without my perpetual papoose. "I never knew you had a waist", one Jordached girl remarked. I hurried with clicking heels past the

lengthening shadows of Border Street, to the welcoming light of the school.

Its cavernous interior vibrated with stereophonic echoes of shouts, laughter, footsteps. Essence of chlorine mingled with the scents of Marboros and new carpets. As I found the right room and slid into the blue plastic seat, I felt like a girl on the first day of kindergarten. Four other women shyly chose their places. Each scanned the room for that kind and sensitive man that Ann Landers promised to be found at evening classes. Prince Charming however failed to show.

Our instructor, Bob, seemed a person possessed with a coil of energy, thin with wire-rimmed glasses and a perpetual cigarette between his fingers. He perched casually on the desktop, addressing us as though we really were capable of becoming artistes. As we gathered up our assignments, my classmates seemed more sceptical. "I don't think I'll ever be a writer," mourned a pleasant-faced matron with honey blond curls.

As sessions followed, Monday after Monday, the students came into sharper focus. One young mother with startling jade colored eyes and a sleek mane of black hair, had grown up on mean streets where only Italians were welcome and the gangs and their debs held sway over their kingdoms. To my right sat a woman, mature but attractive, who seemed graciously accustomed to success. Only the polished composed side of herself seemed to show 'til I wondered if her eyes had ever cried. Near the wall sat a woman whose demeanor suggested that giving had been the pattern of her life. She had a successful grown up son and a husband "til death do us part", yet I sensed a great neediness in here. Another lady dropped out and was replaced by a precocious red haired little girl who tried her best to be grown. Most felt squeamish about committing words to paper, but my writing seemed to come spilling out from deep inside.

I was weaving a story cut of all my left-over sorrows. My baby's father had recently married someone else which led me to remember what Juanita, a hometown friend had shared with me, how she and her family got left behind while her care-free father married a young bride in a grandiose church wedding. I began a story through Juanita's eyes and wove into it all the congas, rhythms, wise grandmothers, witchcraft and supernatural revenge that was my fantasy vindication for all of us. I mixed in all our struggles to feed our children and still find dignity. I even had the nerve to look for a happy ending, but how? My saga had reached an impasse.

That evening, Bob failed to attend. We watched the hands of the clock slide by, wondering if he had met with foul play. After the director assured us that he was okay, we decided to hold class among ourselves.

The married lady began to cry. She had signed up for several creative courses to find herself and prove herself. Yet the constant belittlement she received from her spouse and son had her feeling too stupid, too hopeless to try.

"Wait", I counseled, "did you ever stop to think that he might be afraid that if you do succeed, you might not need him anymore? Let him know that you are somebody, at least you'll be proud of your self and someday he'll have to be proud of you too."

Suddenly, the impeccable lady to my right joined in. Her career success seemed to make men insecure and I began to realize that she might be just as lonely as me, with my homemade clothes and food stamps. That evening we left like sisters, the married one rode us in her car to Maverick Station, where the executive lady and I took our time ordering coffee at the Harbormart, keeping warm and out of reach of the night creatures who inhabited the station. Finally my bus crawled in.

I was anxious to return home and finish my story. Now I knew it would end with women encouraging each other to be strong. For all of us are lonely and sometimes strangers, regardless of address, culture, possessions or lack of them. And because I still have a crazy faith, I even supplied a kind and sensitive man to clinch the happy ending. Soon, Bob had our stories zeroxed to share.

"My husband can't believe you wrote that story", remarked my married friend, "He thinks you copied it from somewhere".

"Tell him thanks for the compliment!", I countered. I couldn't wait for him to read my NEXT episode.



Chapter III.

When English Is a Second Language

As I walk into the small, cramped office of the Quincy Community School's ESL (English as a Second Language) program on the edge of Chinatown, I meet Rich Levy, its Director. He wears blue jeans, a red Che Guevara tee-shirt, and has a full beard with a long, wispy Ho Chi Minh goatee. Probably in his mid-40's, he reminds me of my radical friends of the 60's and early 70's, except that his appearance hasn't changed. Nor has his vision, as I understand after he has told me about the program he has helped to put together for Asian immigrants and refugees over the past seven years.

Facts:

- This is the only bilingual, Cantonese-English ESL program in Boston.
- 400 people are enrolled, 400 are on the waiting list—some still in Hong Kong and China, where people know about the program.
- It is a three year program, of six six month semesters; the last semester is conducted entirely in English.
- The program runs all year long and is open at hours that meet the needs of its clients: 2 classes run from 1-2:30; 12 from 4:15-8:00.

"The men [Rich is talking] work six days a week, twelve hours a day, plus commute 1½ hours each way. They man the Chinese restaurants in Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Eastern Connecticut, and Massachusetts as far out as Springfield. Each restaurant has a van, and at three o'clock in Chinatown, you will see 400 men outside waiting for their vans. There is no family time, no learning time, no hope. Many were doctors, chemical engineers, teachers; they don't know English, so they get low-paying jobs—as dishwashers, busboys. They are underemployed. But they don't have time to learn English, so they can't translate their skills.

"There are three restaurant shifts: the dim sum shift, from 6AM to 6 PM. There are maybe 20 dim sum chefs in Boston; four are in the 6:30 class. The day shift: 10AM to 10 PM. No classes are available to these people. The late shift: 2:30 PM to 1-4 AM. We get these people in the one o'clock classes.

"The women work in garment factories, a dying industry. They do piecework and have unsteady hours: three weeks with no work, four weeks at 60 hours a week, with no over-time pay; or twelve hours for two days, then three days with nothing. It's hard to plan child-care around this. Long-term, the women will be out of work for three months, work steadily for six. Some never make a minimum wage; the garment industry is judgment proof: a company can easily claim bankruptcy, since it has no equity, no inventory, no buildings. The best workers make \$260 a week in a good week; their annual wage is between four and seven or eight thousand dollars. They know about unemployment, but not about workers compensation.

"As for family life, the women get half of Saturday and all of Sunday off; the men get Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday off. Many women take off the day their husbands have off, with no penalty either at the factories or here at school.

"If they come from Viet Nam, most have had a third grade education; if from Hong Kong, a fifth or sixth grade; if from China and they are over 40, a fourth grade; if under 30, an eighth grade education.

"A large number of the students are 23 year old women. If they come from Hong Kong, they are married—arranged marriages with men who have come from the US to get them. They are afraid to go out at night, they work in a bad garment factory, they can't speak English, they have no relatives for 4000 or 5000 miles, it's snowing — something they've never seen before — and they're pregnant.

"The community school becomes their community. Bilingual classes are culturally sensitive; they make the students feel at home, not on someone else's turf. They help give them more confidence. 20% of class-time is reserved for conversation and social time. The women form friendships that break their isolation.

“When they leave the program after three years, these people have a third to fifth grade level of English, oral better than written. This is an introductory program, which makes them functionally English speaking. They make some grammatical mistakes and can’t talk about delicate topics; but they can accomplish daily living tasks and enter any job training program or get an external high school diploma.

“We don’t do a lot of job placement; but we do job counseling and get them into accounting or computer programs so they can work in banks in accounting and book-keeping jobs, at Blue Cross-Blue Shield, in English-speaking factories, and data entry jobs.

“And we build job counseling and home skills into the curriculum. This curriculum is very ‘Wednesday’ [that is, it is as rooted in the commonplace as are the curricula of most community school educational programs I have visited, though maybe even moreso]. Sentences and grammar and vocabulary are built upon practical survival topics:

- **Day-care:** a list of day-care centers in Chinatown, with their hours, fees, ages; a list of questions to ask at day-care centers.
- **Restaurants:** explain in dialogue-practice that the boss can’t make you pay for broken dishes or for a customer who leaves without paying his bill.
- **Land-lords:** it doesn’t count if land-lords tell you that you have to leave; they have to be able to prove that you know, e.g., notify you by registered mail.
- **Shopping:** how do you fight the battles with used furniture stores and tell them that you didn’t order that or that they can’t do that to you.
- **Health:** includes critical but rarely taught terms like “rectal thermometer” and an entire unit on gynecological terms and problems, permitting women to ask the questions they need to ask and thus get the care they would otherwise miss. (At these publically-held lessons, many Asian men leave the room.)

The lesson on mental health (which I visited in the sixth semester, English-only class) includes a homework assignment of writing letters to Dear Abby. In class the letters were read, and responses were first written to other people’s questions, and then offered orally in English that was sometimes halting, but certainly understandable. Two letters were particularly memorable:

Dear Abby:

I hope you can help me with my problem. My problem is that my mother-in-law lives with us. She talks too much and gives us too much advice. Sometimes I feel very angry with her. But I have never argued with her. One thing I can do. I would never talk with her. No more talking with her. No more gossip.

Unhappy

The respondent wrote:

Dear Unhappy;

I think your problem is nothing. It is usual for old woman to talk too much. Advice or too much advice is correct especially for young man. When you get older, you will know that. I am sorry I cannot help you.

Abby

The second letter reads:

Dear Abby:

I hope you can help me with my problem. My problem is that I have culture shock and I am lonely. Because I don’t know in English and when I left China I miss all my close friends. In America there is no one I can talk to about my problem. Sometimes I try to solve the problem myself, but I always get frustrated. Now I feel very depressed and worried. I am afraid of myself. What should I do?.

Confused.

Dear Confused:

Your problem is every immigrant’s problem. First time you have to try to know some new friend such as go to South Cove Community Health Center. It has some activity to help people who just move in US and you can go to school to study English too.

Abby.

“There are special rules for teaching Asians: you must never ask them to write in the first person about sickness or health; it might bring bad luck. And when working with Southeast Asians, you must never ask about their families in family lessons, but rather about hypothetical families.”



"We do more. We provide translation, counseling, and advocacy services. We don't try to be objective; we're prejudiced, biased in the student's favor. If he says he's having trouble with the landlord or the phone company, we assume he's right and we'll fight them. We fight bosses for our students, insurance stuff, school placement and problems with teachers, immigration, legal problems. We help with forms, and go with them to doctors if necessary.

"We have a liaison with the mental health center, to whom we can refer people or get advice about what to say to them, if, for example, they've only now, after two years, got enough trust to tell us that their husband is beating on them.

"At the same time, we try to encourage self-choice and self-reliance. We don't tell them what to do. We point out and help them figure out the consequences of various courses of action, and then tell them they have to choose.

"We deal with collective community issues. For example, Tufts Medical school bought a number of garment factories and said they would be closed in six weeks, leaving 800 people out of work. We fought that and have put it off for two years; and Tufts is putting the factories into place elsewhere. We've worked on low-income housing issues here. We bring the issues into the classes, organize demonstrations, meet with city officials. We get politically involved and build issues into the classroom."

Rich Levy stops talking. I understand that it is his radical vision that has identified the issues which he calls "Wednesday" in this program, and which mark it as a far from Wednesday program.

Across the hall from the Adult Basic Education study room at the Jamaica Plain Community School is the ESL room. There, Jamie Treat is teaching ESL to about twelve people. It's a small class tonight; the usual crowd isn't there. There is an Asian couple, younger and older women, Hispanics. They know each other, help each other with these strange words and illogical phrases.

This class is taught in English, like most ESL classes in the community school program, and Jamie is drilling her students on idioms and prepositional phrases. She stands before them at a long table and, with props, acts out the phrases they are learning. Her smile engages theirs as they play out the drama of a broken radio needing repairs in the middle of the night. "Nobody's open at night." "I have to wait until tomorrow." "Take it apart." "Take the old batteries out." "Put in the new batteries." "What should she do?" Jamie asks. One person answers, and they all repeat the answer.

On to a ball-point pen. "Take the pen apart." "Put it together." I see a blow-dryer on the table, but don't wait to hear about that one.

This program, like many ESL programs in the community schools, is coordinated with the Basic Education program, so people can progress smoothly from one level to the next. When they are basically fluent here, they move across the hall, and then they can work through the competencies to an EDP or GED diploma.

Nearly 20% of Boston's population was born outside the United States or Canada; one in six of Boston's adults lives in a household in which English is not the language usually spoken at home. Each year the community schools, through programs like these, help 1000 of the immigrants and refugees who have come to Boston from Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, China, Puerto Rico, El Salvador, Cape Verde, Lebanon, Russia, Poland... The list of countries and the numbers of people needing a new language are breath-taking.



Chapter IV.

Getting To The Other Side

Michele quit school when she was 15 and in 7th grade. She lost one year because of kidney trouble. She lost another year because of busing: no-one in her neighborhood went to school that first year, out of fear. She lost a third year, or most of it, because she was attacked when she did go to school. By that time she was 13 and in grade 5.

Ed graduated from 8th grade on the Honor Roll, but when he enrolled in Boston Tech, he couldn't take the pressure: getting up early, sitting for six hours in class, working. He quit. What did him in was difficult pressures at home, a mom with several kids. That meant he had to go to work, which meant he couldn't focus on school. But after a year out, he realized he was in a dead-end work situation, and he came to City Roots.

Diane is an unmarried teen-aged mother and she's pregnant again. She dropped out of high school in 10th grade. She tried City Roots three times, dropped out twice. She had no baby-sitting, so she quit. At first she wasn't sure she wanted to come back, because all her friends had already graduated.

Sheila dropped out of school at 12 on the first day, when her mom died. She reentered at 15, but dropped out at 16, when her dad died. She never went back.

These kids — young people — walk around at 16, 19, 20 with histories no one should have accumulated by 90. Some are the kids who fell through the cracks during busing, the victims of their frequent absence from school during the first year of busing in 1974, and of the violence which accompanied that rapid social upheaval, disrupting what time they did have in school. Some are the victims of poverty, of neglect, of death, and of despair. Some are victims of the social isolation, hopelessness, and lack of social mobility in their neighborhoods. Most have experienced little or no success in each of these arenas, and more. Some have turned to drugs, some have been in trouble with the law, many have become mothers before they have finished their own schooling.

But they aren't only victims, by a long shot, and City Roots, the community schools' alternative high school, is designed to meet their determination to prove something to themselves and to make something better of their lives.

The Facts

City Roots is an alternative high school program, helping students between the ages of 16 and 21 to prepare for the GED examination. City Roots helps students prepare to cope with the difficulties of life, to make decisions about career goals, and to prepare for the world of work. That is, City Roots functions like a senior year in high school, and deals with career and social concerns as well as academic matters. Currently there are three City Roots sites: the Uphams Corner Municipal Building in Dorchester, and the Condon and the Blackstone Community Schools. In 1984-1985 there will be two more sites, at the Charlestown Community School and the Orient Heights Recreation Center in East Boston.

Barbara Machtinger, head teacher at the Condon's City Roots site, explains the program more richly: "These kids haven't succeeded in school, for academic and behavior reasons. They have missed a year for health, family problems, race problems. When they do go back to school, they're older and the schools aren't equipped to deal with them.

"These are kids who want to do this for themselves. Usually they've been out of school for a while and know what's ahead; they're the ones who do best.

"The kids gain support, gain confidence. They have to have a success; then they can try it on their own. They come with failure, and leave with a better sense of themselves, with confidence. People have been telling them they can, and then they do — pass the GED test — and then they can go on.

"Attention is what makes the difference. In public schools, the student/teacher ratio in most classrooms is 35 to 1. The teachers aim their teaching at the mainstream; the bright are bored and act out, the less bright are lost. At City Roots, there are 2½ teachers for 25 kids, only 10 kids in a group."

Brian Connolly, Coordinator at the Condon, joins Barbara in explaining: "Students gain entrance through an interview process in which they must convince the staff that they want to do this and will make a commitment to be here. A lot of deals are made along the way; students are expected to live up to their responsibilities.

The main requirement for entrance is motivation and lack of other options. 70 kids apply for 25 spots; we take the oldest first, the most needy, and try to get the others into other alternative programs.

"Whole families have gone through City Roots. It's good for young mothers, for whom the public schools are impossible: they're made fun of, there's no baby sitting. The kids at City Roots are supportive; they work as friends and don't criticize. In fact, that's pretty much required: if you don't get along with the others, we don't want you here. Peer pressure works to make it work for everyone.

"Past grads give motivation to students here now, share what they are doing now. It's expected, an unspoken requirement, to give something back to the program."

These kids know why they are here:

- Ed says, "I'd probably be working at Burger King for the rest of my life without City Roots."
- Tako: "My mom says, you can't be the family flunky. I'm doing this for my mom, to be like my sister, and for myself."
- Phyllis: "I was just hanging around the house, doing nothing, losing touch with everything. I forgot all the math I knew. Now I'm doing something. My baby's grandmother keeps telling me I can't do it; she puts me way down. But I wanted a high school diploma — to prove a point."
- Diane: "Education is very important to me. I want to go to college. I want a nice job and want my son to go to school. He'll see me going. I need to prove that I can move on. A lot of kids are wasting their time; school is free. They need to wake up."
- Sheila: "I have to prove I can do it; I've always messed up."

It's the teachers that make the program work—their love, their determination, their humor. They hold on to these kids, keep them going when their motivation fades. And they hold them up during the rough times — providing lollipops and back-rubs during the frightening GED exams, helping kids through rape, incest, violent death, family violence, drugs. These teachers are special people, and without them most of these kids wouldn't make it. Somehow, they manage to give and give, and give more, over years.

Barbara Machtinger, at the Condon, is thin, energetic, smart, articulate, intensely in motion. "I had been teaching 8th grade social studies in Newton, but I wanted to do inner-city work. Here, you get to teach, be principal, disciplinarian, janitor, counselor, career and drug counselor. There's more diversity, more fun, more control than teaching five courses a day every day in a big system. The pay isn't as good, but I have other concerns and values.

"I also teach one course in history at Bunker Hill, which makes a nice balance: I get the history and the adults there; the intimacy, the personal here. I'm constantly making decisions, constantly on the move."

I watch Liz Hjeltness, head teacher at Uphams Corner, at the Dorchester City Roots graduation. She's nervous about speaking in front of a crowd, but there's a lot of love in this room filled with blacks, whites, and Hispanics, and lots of small children, mostly the kids of the kids who are graduating. One cries "Mama!" as his mother walks across the stage. Liz gives every student a big supportive hug. Graduates strut across that stage, waving the victory signal, smiling almost beyond possibility.

"The rewards come from what you get from kids coming back," she told me a few days before. "For example, an 81 grad called the other day. He had had drug and alcohol problems. When he was drunk one night a couple of years ago, he had a car crash that killed his best friend's sister. Now he's been sober for two years.

"It's kids getting to the other side that makes the difference.

"I love counseling best in my job. The emotional growth and helping kids learn to ask for help and learn about themselves is the most important part of this job. More important, really, than teaching GED skills.

"This school is racially mixed. In Social Studies and Values Clarification, we talk about government and the kids' own power or lack of it. We talk about our prejudices, fears and anger, laughter and love. I can watch them opening up, developing trust, and try to get them to see each other as individuals, not as examples of their race. I require kids to respect each other, not necessarily to like each other. It's o.k. to be angry. We do feed-back exercises in group, encourage the kids to talk to each other."

[Diane has told me: "We all stick together. There's no fighting. We can bring out our dislikes, rather than being jumped after school.

The others cheer you up when you're feeling bad. These are the kind of teachers, this is your home, you're safe here. They listen."

And Tako: "The teachers are all white; at first I felt uncomfortable. I found out it was all right."

"A number of kids are on drugs. A rule of the program is that they can't come to school high. They test this, and get sent home. I do a lot of drug and alcohol awareness in Values Clarification and Social Studies. I can't change their behavior, but they should become conscious of it.

"We also do an effective women's group using the **Our Bodies, Ourselves** book. They know so little about sex, birth control, how to communicate in relationships. There's also a men's group.

"Once a week we do exercises about what's getting in the way. And every day they write in their journals. I read them and respond to what's written. Some heavy stuff comes out in the journals, with kids who can't talk in group

or one-on-one. I can catch a kid who's sliding and work with him or her.

"Kids are bored hanging out on the streets and come to this program. We provide fun as well as learning. We laugh a lot, we hear fantastic stories."

All this humor and caring are evident in the graduation. And you know it's the important part of all three City Roots programs, the part that keeps the kids there and gets them through this first big success. Some go on to college, though the transition to a place without all that support is hard. The women get off welfare, and both the men and women get jobs they couldn't otherwise get. They can look to the future with hope.

One mother, at her son's high school graduation, poignantly said it all: "It has meant so much for my son. His life was in chaos. These teachers helped him so much. Thank God for all that. I'm just so glad for everybody."

The Sky Has Roots

by Dariberto Vasquez

As you all know there are lots of us that don't care about school or life. So let me tell you something.

I was one of you guys out there but I was the worst one believe me or not. I didn't care about nothing.

I use to hate school so much I use to go once a week.

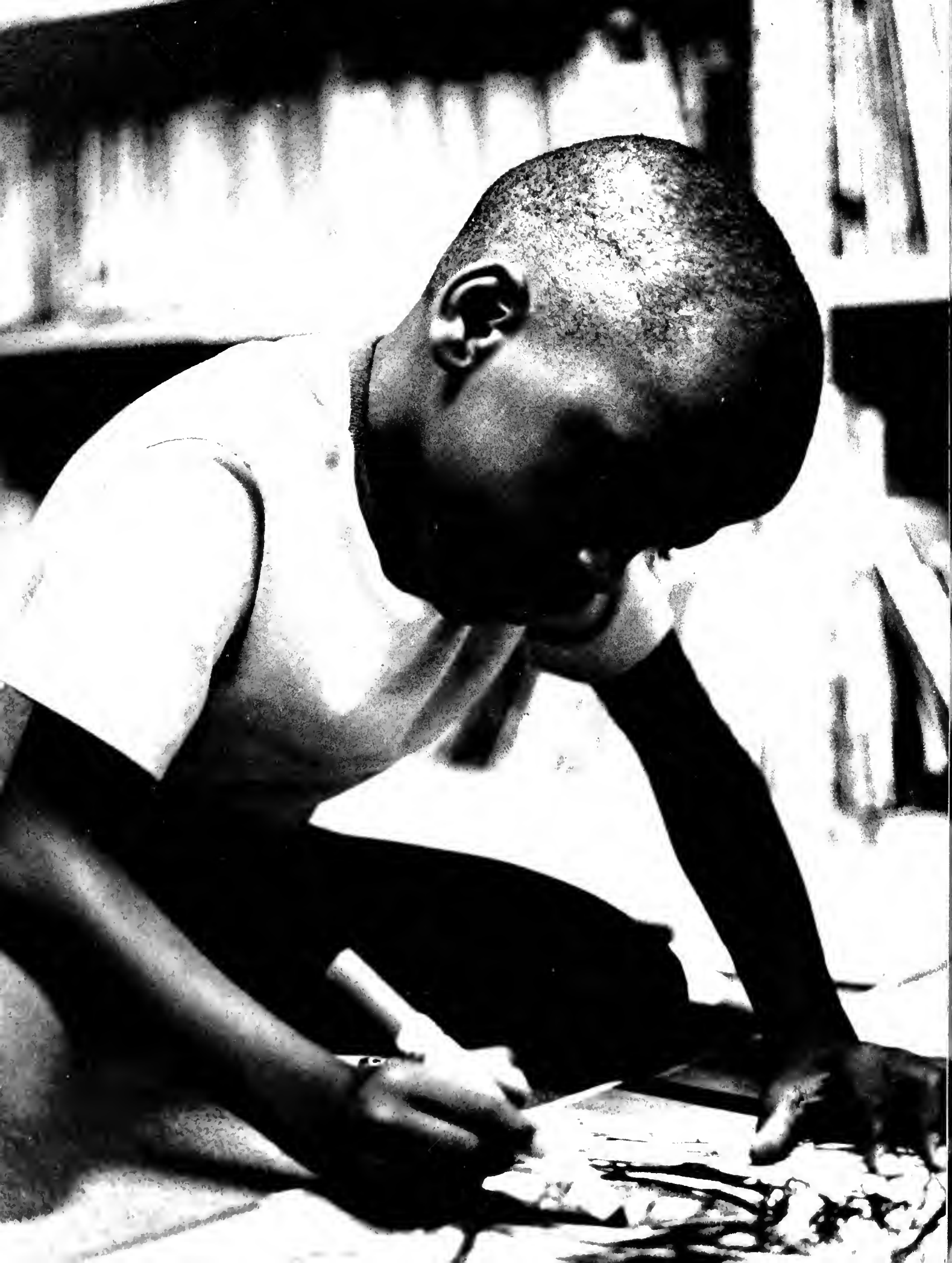
But let me tell you something. Since I was a little kid I always wanted to become a pilot. But I thought I could never get there even if I was born again. So after finishing middle school I went to high school but like I said only once a week. I went to high school for two years. After a while I dropped out and started to work full time because I thought working was the way it was suppose to be. I didn't believe in Education. After working for a few months my manager started telling me that in a couple of years I needed a high school diploma to wash their toilets. I use to get mad at myself but didn't really care what they said. I just wanted that money. So I said to myself I am going to put some money away to get out of here for good. So I did it I save some and went away. I flew to Puerto Rico. I use to think going away was going to make things get a lot better. I stay down in Puerto Rico for 8 months with out doing anything for myself. My mother was so nice that every now and then she use to send me some money. It was allright because I had a big part of my family around me. After so much time wasted my mind started to get clear. My uncle use to tell me how hard it was for him to get around because he

didn't have the Education he needed. This started to worry me a lot more about my Education. So I told my mother that I wanted to come back to Boston and I did. I missed my family but I knew they wasn't going to be around my back the rest of my life. After being back in my sweet house, I got in touch with a great friend of mine who use to teach me in middle school. I told her that I was ready to go back to school to finish up what I had left behind.

So this nice lady brought me to meet a good friend of her's that was teaching a program called City Roots. I did everything that was possible to get into the program.

I promised them that I was done with those stupid games I use to play. I really wanted my Education and bad. They got me going to school. I was doing my best. I kept my promise and I always will. After being around with these terrific teachers I got so use to them that I told them what I really wanted. This was to be a pilot! I don't know how, but these two terrific teachers got me into a flying school where now I am learning how to fly airplanes. I love it as much as I love them. Real soon I am heading to college and no one knows where I will be in a few years. I took time but I did it. Another thing that I've got to say to you. My friends, don't let that peer pressure get into you. This pressure had part of my life but it doesn't anymore.

I am a new person believe it or not. City Roots and their teachers are so perfect and excellent that we will all together did it. Not only for me but for so many people. My friends, I am getting to know what life really is. I thought I knew. I was wrong I didn't. So never give up fight to *the end*.



Chapter V.

Kids, Kids, Kids

"We'll have three-year-old triplets in the fall," Pat Brainard (Administrative Coordinator at the Jackson/Mann) tells me of their pre-school day care program. "Their mother is a single parent and couldn't otherwise go to work. Who would take care of triplets? When my kids were small and I had to go to work, my mother was home. But now grandmothers are younger. And especially for the refugees, there aren't any grandmothers around. We had an aunt or a sister-in-law to help. We had somebody. Today there isn't always somebody."

Though most cases aren't as extreme as triplets, the need for quality all-day child care in Boston is great. Most families can't make it on one person's income these days and some 20% of Boston's families are headed by a single parent. Translated another way, one-third of white children and two-thirds of black and Hispanic children live with one parent. For these reasons, and others, nearly two-thirds of the women between the ages of 20 and 44 work. The numbers needing a safe and secure place for their children far exceed the amount of day care available.

Many of these people can't pay a lot for day care. Again some figures: at least 40% of school-aged children live in families with less than \$10,000 in income. 29% of white children are in this category, 50% of black children, and 95% of Hispanic children.

In response to these needs, four kinds of programs for kids through age twelve have been developed at the community schools, though not all will be found at each school. Programs run throughout the year.

- pre-school programs for 3's and 4's, who generally come for two to three mornings or afternoons a week
- pre-school day care for 3's, 4's, and 5's (after kindergarten), all day, five days a week
- after-school day care for elementary school children to age 12, each afternoon until five or six, and all day during school vacations
- after-school reading, remedial and enrichment reading instruction in small groups, for elementary school children in grades 1-5.

In addition, many schools offer after-school activities, such as ballet or ceramics or gymnastics, that kids can join without being in one of the day care programs. And in at least one school, the Condon, I saw a Montessori pre-school (an educational enrichment program) in operation.

Community School pre-schools look just like quality nursery schools anywhere: large, light, spacious rooms, their walls invariably adorned with the primitive and beguiling artwork of small children. Lots of equipment—blocks, dress-ups, play kitchens, books, tricycles, a log-cabin house in one of them, and a piano. Outdoor playgrounds. I see children swinging on swings and climbing on jungle gyms, bumping into each other and crying; children sitting in a circle with their teacher, learning how to write their names—sometimes backwards, sometimes forwards; children making trains out of blocks, or dressing up to play mommy and daddy, or coloring with crayons gripped hard in their fists and pressed almost to the breaking point on their papers. Children intent upon their business.

I chat at the Ohrenberger with some Moms who sit in the cafeteria, drink coffee, and talk while their children are in the pre-school—an unstructured but important part of the program which provides mothers with a community of their own. These moms like the program, which was designed carefully with the input of mothers when it began in 1973. They like the teachers and are glad they've stayed a long time. It gives the kids a known face. "My 2nd grader still likes to come back to see the teacher. The teachers go out of their way."

They say the kids like the program too and go in each time with no problem. Joe Beth, a retired senior who is President of the Ohrenberger Council, shakes his head and boasts: "We have wonderful teachers. These kids run into school — I was always running out. Everyday they take something home, they paint pictures. We have a sandbox and a tricycle for everyone." I saw that everyone — moms and kids — had arrived about half-an-hour before school opened and thronged the hall in their eagerness to get in. And I'm told that on registration day, the program fills up in the first two hours. You have to come early to get in.

The children arrive after school in bunches, either coming over from the public school which the community school shares or coming by van from other schools (transportation from school and to the home is provided). They tumble about and have snack — in some cases juice and crackers, in others what looks more like lunch or dinner: bread, milk, hash, corn, plums.

And then, until 5:30 or 6:00, they play: they swim; they play dodge ball or hide-and-go-seek or basketball in the gym or outside on good days; they go on field trips to the Museum of Science or to the Aquarium; they paint and make enormous, colorful paper Christmas trees which are then attached to the walls; they put on plays.

I saw extravagant tissue paper flowers on the wall at the Mattahunt, and at the Agassiz, Denise Cordero, a precocious first grader stood on the table and tried to get the others to join her in scenes from "Alice in Wonderland," which they had put on several weeks ago. She remembered all the lines of all the parts and was eager to show off. At the Blackstone, the children were seated on the floor, having a serious talk with their teachers — a woman and, unusually, a man — about accepting newcomers into the group. At the Jackson/Mann, I came upon two 8-year-old Asian boys deep in a game of chess and another group of boys and girls who, when I told them my name was Lee, called me "American Chop Suey," in a fit of giggles.



Here's what the kids say:

Art, by the way, is great. We do things like paint, make tissue flowers and a lot more. I just can't remember them all. Well they're all great to do. I like the music and art on Friday. It gives me something to do instead of sitting around playing Atari and mope. We do lots of things at the Condon School. And nothing is better than the Condon Community School programs, no way!

I like gymnastics because it is fun. The strategy about gymnastics is exercising. We do a lot of exercising. First we do some jumping jacks, and then we do some fold rolls. Straddles are almost the hardest of all. You have to spread out your legs and turn over and push up on your feet. After we do our exercising we go to the trampoline. The trampoline is fun when you know how to use it. Well, I already know how to use it. Boy it's fun! Now I do some front flips and back flips.

After school there is gym for boys. They like to play hockey. There's two teams. There's Dell and another team. I like to watch them play.

One day after school there was a swimming contest and I came in fourth place, but I'm still proud of it. And Tammy Gates won a trophy for swimming.



At the Mattahunt, which has both Massachusetts Department of Social Services (DSS) protective child slots (protective children are, for example, abused children or children with special needs) and vouchers, a pretty girl wearing a white summer dress comes into the director's office with a jar of tadpoles she has found somewhere, hoping to leave them safely on the desk for the afternoon. She is about 8 or 9 years old. Leta McKinnon, the head teacher, tells me: "She used to be nearly autistic. Once she didn't come to school for a couple of weeks and we found that her foster mother had beaten her, as she had beaten her brother before. She has been through three traumatic experiences, in three homes. Now she's in her first home that has both a mom and a dad. We're all hoping they'll adopt her and her brother. The kids like this mom and dad."

Sue Mechan tells me that though the Jackson/Mann, like most community schools, has sliding fee scales in the after-school program, they have no protective slots. (Also that they have no DSS vouchers, because only the poorest of the poor who know get them. And the refugees don't know.) A large number of the kids, however, should be protective. Yet if the

community school reports them, the kids get pulled out of the program by their parents. So the Jackson/Mann has started a peer counseling group — a typically practical and innovative approach to a difficult problem.

These are grisly stories, but mostly the news is good. As Mary Beth Callahan, head teacher at the Jackson/Mann, told me: "The program is important for parents. They need this. We have Chinese, Vietnamese, Spanish kids. They all speak English. Some kids come year after year; we have three in a family. They feel very secure in this program."

Or, as John McCarthy (Administrative Coordinator at the Harborside) said: "A lot of parents are single parents or have to work. Working is not a luxury for these moms. Their kids are safe and cared for."

The Condon Community School has been a great help for me. After school on Tuesdays I go to a reading class where I get taught to read, and learn to understand things more easily. Some of the things we do are speed read and read things about different cultures. I learned what signs are and what they mean. Sometimes we play games that teach homonyms and synonyms.

The Reading is fun. We learn to read fast. I think it is great to go to the Condon Community School. I say it is a cool school. I love the Condon. I like the things we do. What is better than going to the Condon? Nothing is better than the Condon School. A Bruins game? No way!

I like reading because we learn about different things, like people camping. We go on trips to the Pizza Parlor. We have gone to the Museum of Science.

I am eight. I go to the Condon School. I go to reading. It is fun there. My teacher's name is Molly. She is very nice. I have 53 stars. I go to reading. I do a lot of reading and I play games. I like it because it helps me learn to read better.

I am very glad that my school has this program because it helps to educate. We all go to pizza. Molly brings us there. Thank you Molly.



Deborah Webster, a teacher in the after school reading program at the Harborside, tells me more: "The kids love it; they get lots of attention, and we have fun. They read me stories and choose what book they want to read. We supplement the book with xeroxed work sheets. We do reading projects and help them with their homework.

"We provide the kids with another opportunity to read and to gain confidence in a relaxed program. We play games. They learn more from that.

"Not all the children are reading handicapped, but most have some reading difficulties and are a little behind in reading. We have a lot of bilingual kids, whose parents have trouble helping them with their homework.

"Eleanor Webster [the Director of the program] knows the neighborhood. She works in the O'Donnell school, the local elementary school, as part of our reading program. She's the liaison teacher there."

Surprisingly, these cheerful remarks are made in response to one of the after school reading programs, begun in the community schools in 1976 and currently running at the Blackstone, Condon, Tynan, Harborside, and Agassiz Community Schools. Kids meet twice a week for an hour in groups of three or four to work on reading, both for school and for pleasure.



We are sitting in a small area with two round tables and lots of bookshelves with lots of books. It's a colorful, cheerful, welcoming room. Eleanor has been working with three children, who leave. She comes over to the table where Deborah and I have been talking, and tells me that she works with one group of kids at the elementary school and another here. That way even more kids get help. It is her work at the local school that leads to referrals from teachers to the after-school program at the Harborside.

"There's nowhere else that provides academic help for the kids here. They can't afford tutoring. Here it's free. On school vacations, we do field trips. We go to the Boston Public Library, the movies, the science museum. We go roller skating."

The idea is to make the reading program fun and to bolster children who need help. The program also bolsters parents, by helping them know how to help their children with reading at home, and by helping them with the public schools, serving as a liaison when necessary. It provides counselling and information and helps parents — some of whom are reluctant to talk to school teachers because of their own academic inexperience — to communicate with the public schools.

It's a preventive program. The object is to catch kids before it's too late — before they fail, get bored, and drop out — and to give them the skills and the confidence they will need to succeed in school.

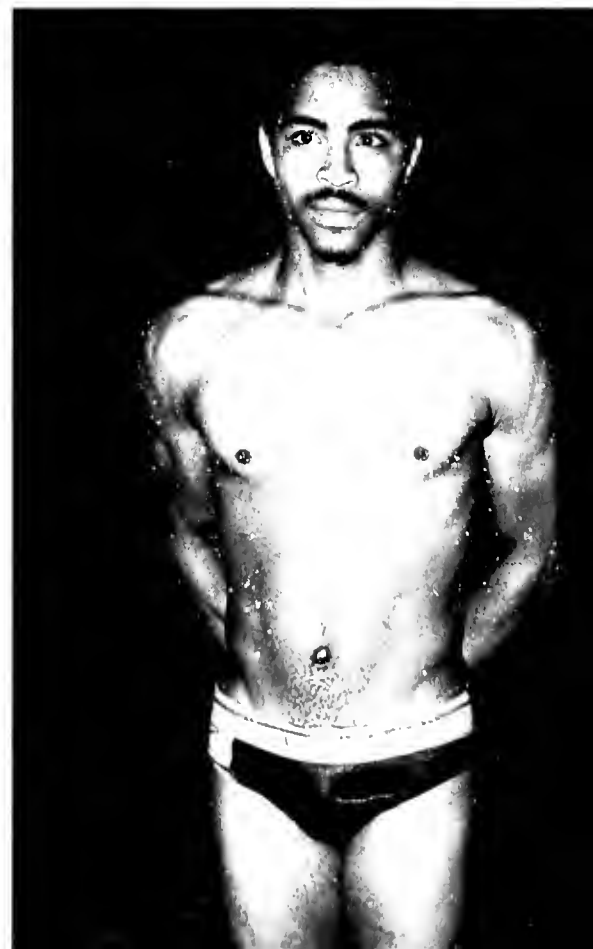
Parents, predictably, are pleased with the after school reading program. Their children read better and do better in school. As they say themselves:

The program has helped all my children. Maddie had a problem with reading. The program has widened her horizons. Buddy already liked to read. The program's given him a really good selection of books. Being a working mother, the time the teachers spend with the kids is time I can't always spend with the kids myself.

Tricia loves to go after school. She's getting lots of help with her reading. And she loves to read now.

The reading program is fantastic. It's helped them in school and helped them to read more. Now Barbara sits down and can read a book on her own.

The reading program is terrific. I have a daughter who has really learned a lot about books. **But most important she has learned to feel good about herself.**



Chapter VI.

Someplace To Go, Something To Do

Every Kid Needs One

By Pedro Posada

*Living in the town of Jamaica Plain,
A curly-haired youth down memory lane.
Fourteen years old and not much to do,
Except visit the rec hall — the gymnasium too.*

*From the outside the school wasn't much of a sight,
But the inside was great on a cold lonely night.
It was big and grey with side doors made of lead,
"Ain't you learned your lesson, use the front door instead."*

*Fifty cents to go in, that was nothing at all,
After smoking some 'erb' we might even play ball.
The bright lines were smiling and the old men were playing,
Though they couldn't play, it didn't stop them from staying.*

*So, on to bumper pool and ping pong table excitement,
When you think that you're good there's heavy enlightenment.
But I learned to play well as the years went by,
And I learned how to cry when an old man would die.*

*The place stayed the same as if waiting for me,
To want it, to need it, well then let it be.*

*At sixteen I showed to speak to the man,
He'd been running the gym since time first began.
The man's name was Joe, with not one but two hearts,
He could deal with the whole but not with the parts.*

*There were black kids, white kids, brown kids, and more,
Color didn't matter when you walked in the door.
To him we were all the same color and race,
We came out of the same nine-month waiting space.*

*"I want to be a basketball coach,
I'll make them stop drinking and lay off the roach."
A hard promise to keep but I felt good and ready,
To help out the kids who weren't so steady.*

*His name was Lamar, and a hard nut to crack,
He would pull out his blade without any slack.
Mad at the world 'cause the world owed him plenty,
He would not give you answers, there just weren't any.*

*Long battles and all he learned I was a friend,
And that the means did not justify the ends
The family moved, haven't heard from him since,
Hope where he is he's no bum but a prince.*

*The place stayed the same as if waiting for me,
to want it, to need it, well then let it be.*

*With two years of college and nineteen years old,
I felt I had style and knew I was bold.
Ah yes! Gym assistant, new member on
After all these years, the place still makes me laugh.*

*We got a new building to have and to hold,
But the memories here are worth more than gold.
The pay wasn't good and the hours were bad,
But the kicker was this, the budget was sad.*

*Joe was now older, wiser, married?
And now he had help with the load that he carried.
There were four of us working who grew up together,
But the ball that we used was now made of leather.*

*Teen center, my favorite, the winners kept spinning,
They'll soon learn that losing's not too far from winning.
I enjoyed my work without any doubt,
I was mad — Had to leave, work-study ran out.*

*The place stayed the same as if waiting for me,
To want it, to need it, then just let it be.*

*Two years went by, the place, still the same,
The staff may be new but still the same game.
Not just for kids but the elderly too,
So take care of my building — Make sure that you do!*

*I am now twenty-three and in charge just like Joe,
Running a gym, I've been able to grow.
Some kids with problems, if I can help one,
I'll be able to do what someone has done.*

*A new town, a new place, but it's waiting for me,
To want it, to need it, so then let it be.*

Teens

Pedro Posada's poem is one testimonial to what the community schools do for teens. Another living, breathing example is Brian Connolly, now Administrative Coordinator at the Condon:

"I started here when I was fifteen, when the Community School just opened. I was one of the kids they had to reach so the building wouldn't be destroyed, who would advocate for the program. I was in the first group of teen-agers.

"I am a product of what can happen to people here; I don't know what I would be doing if I hadn't had Larry Dwyer. He got me through high school and gave me money for jobs (\$15 a week!!!). Then I was hanging around 40 hours a week and Larry saw I needed to be paid. I've done almost every job here. I'm the youngest coordinator in the system—I'm almost 25."

It's in recreation, mostly, that teens are served in the community schools. Everyone knows the problems: hanging around, boredom, drugs, alcohol, fights, trouble with the law, and, for the girls, pregnancies. It's a difficult time in anybody's life, and particularly in crowded urban areas.

So the community schools provide someplace to go and something to do, and they combine that with a tough, realistic, and caring approach to the kids. John McCarthy, 27 and at the Harborside, is another youthful coordinator, not too removed in time from his own teens:

"We get the teens to play basketball, swim, do sports, go on field trips. It scares me: I know the dangers of hanging around, peer pressure, panic pressure, alcohol, drugs. We have substance abuse programs; we sneak them in. They love to learn what drugs are and to talk about alcoholism. We treat the kids with respect. They're not bad. We get after them to pick up after themselves, and be respectful. We talk with them when we meet them on the street corners, ask them about their futures.

"When I was a kid [in Dorchester], I respected people who were not drinking, but were well-rounded. I feel sorry for the kids: they don't have a lot to look forward to or look up to.

"My mother died when I was 12, there were seven of us. We all grew up: went to

school, didn't get in trouble with the law. We always had a lot of responsibilities. We get the kids to work for and with us. We give them responsibility, credit, a start. We give them a chance to get involved and really do things.

"You can be flexible, but you have to be firm."

He's a man with a big heart and a twinkle in his voice, and I can well imagine him hanging in there with those kids in a way that helps.

A lot of what the schools do is what they did with Brian Connolly—co-opt them. They take the worst kid around and hire him. They establish a sense of ownership, of turf, for the teens in the neighborhood—and the break-ins and trashing stops. At the Jackson/Mann, the boy who broke in 1½ years ago now works for ABCD and is a role model for younger kids. At the Condon, they call it their "anti-vandalism program."

Another way of looking at this is that the community schools provide new options and new horizons for kids, in addition to channelling energies through active physical play. They teach sportsmanship, discipline, and an attitude toward themselves and each other the kids haven't encountered before. In some schools this becomes as explicit as having teen drop-in centers with group and one-on-one rap sessions.

Sometimes, not surprisingly, the schools have to be tough—anyone working with teens has to know how and where to set limits. "In the past two years, we have had only a couple of incidents, mostly to try us out," laughs Wyola Garrett at the Mattahunt one hot morning. "Early on, when I first came, we were having some trouble, so I called a friend in the Police Department and told him I needed some help to get those few bullies to back off so the rest could feel free here. He did over-kill: 20 police cars showed up. He is a huge, burly, enormous Irish cop, and he came in and banged on my door until I was afraid. Then he says to me, in a very loud voice, 'If you have any problems, just call me.' The bullies left; and when they came back they joined in. Some of those bullies are now in prep school, ready for college."

Mostly, however, it's a matter of providing lots of time and space for physical activities, both structured and unstructured. A list of

activities gives some sense of the seriousness of this endeavor in the community schools.

- the pool: free-swim, swim teams, diving teams. During the summer, over 1000 people may use a pool in one week.
- basketball, apparently the most played game in Boston: clinics, drop-in basketball, in-house basketball leagues, and BNBL (Boston Neighborhood Basketball League) in the summer. In some schools there are as many as 18 teams.
- floor or street hockey, also the most played game in Boston. There are drop-in games and in-house leagues—at the Jackson/Mann, eight teams in their league.

These activities are the most popular, but by no means the whole story. There's:

- gymnastics, a big program with girls
- cheerleading squads
- tennis
- volleyball
- weight rooms
- karate
- gym programs: open gym and, as Wyola Garrett stresses, structured gym. "In these rec programs, the kids have discipline; they are learning something, although they don't know it. They're learning sportsmanship, attitude."
- soccer leagues and clinics
- scuba diving
- ping-pong
- breakdancing!
- rollerskating
- baseball in summer, a big thing
- track

Impressive.

A sure-fire bet for all teens is trips — skiing, canoeing, biking, to beaches and the amusement park. Fifty kids went up to New Hampshire from the Jackson/Mann last year to go skiing. Janice Hamilton's daughter went. "She would never otherwise have had the chance. For \$10.00 [thanks to Boston's Youth Enrichment Services subsidy] they got equipment and tows. They left at five A.M. and brought their own lunch. These kids now volunteer to help; they pitch right in to carry gym equipment. They have to be busy, to have a sense of ownership. They keep others from writing on the building."

These trips carry a double agenda. The obvious one is having fun and providing "something to do." The more masked is ex-

tending the boundaries for these kids, many of whom are locked into neighborhoods which, for various reasons, are closed. Often they have never gone beyond the physical limits of their neighborhood, not to mention the social and emotional limits. They have little notion of other ways of living or seeing the world and often little tolerance for them in others. Nor do they have much of a notion of what is possible for their own lives. Getting out of the neighborhood can open their eyes to other worlds and new possibilities.

Other activities? plays, art, piano, guitar, dancing. "It seems really unfair that kids in these neighborhoods don't have access to these things," says John McCarthy at the Harborside. "They don't have access because their families are not culturally fluent, and because they lack money." Ted Ross at the Blackstone talks a lot about music, art, drama — more than at most schools I visited. This neighborhood, he says, is not as sports-oriented as others. Wyola Garrett at the Mat-tahunt tells me that last summer they put on "For colored girls who have considered suicide," which had a lot of parts for girls, whom she is hoping to interest in drama. This year, they are doing "The Wiz" and are casting all ages, both boys and girls.

Mrs. Conway, mother and foster mother of 8 children in South Boston, movingly spoke for other parents in a letter she wrote Mayor White some years ago, asking him to continue funding the community schools:

"All we hear about is youngsters in trouble and what we can do to help. Well, the answer is not in closing our community schools, but in taking a closer look at what they are giving our youngsters.

"They are giving our kids a place to go. They are getting troubled kids off the street corners. It is a place where we can all get a feeling of belonging.

"Our play-grounds have been hang-outs and drinking grounds for kids who have no place to go.

"Please let's not add to these the youngsters who are now being helped in our community schools.

"So in closing I ask, as will many parents, help us to keep our community just that. These schools and programs are needed."



Adults

The leisure needs of Boston's adults must not be forgotten in all this concentration on the kids. The community schools know that and provide both recreational programs — the same provided the teen-agers, though, mercifully, at different hours — and classes of all sorts. Classes for women, for men, for older people and for younger people, classes during the day and during the evening: ceramics (all over the city, in huge numbers), sewing, quilting, wood-working, aerobics, jazz and ball-room dancing, drawing and painting, photography, calligraphy, gourmet cooking and just plain cakes, piano, belly dancing, basketweaving, theater.

This is in addition to more practical classes, like typing, public speaking, computer programming, languages, and various college courses from Bunker Hill or UMass/Boston, such as College English or Principles of Accounting.

Having all this available nearby and accessible is a large part of what makes the community schools so successful.

Let The Children Boogie

By Jack McCarthy

I've spent a lot of hours in the Murphy pool, mostly swimming the kind of easy laps that people in sedentary jobs swim after a day's work; once, in a disaster that I do not choose to recall here, playing water basketball. But it is neither of these activities that comes back to me most strongly when I think about the Murphy pool. What I remember best is taking my daughter Kathleen to free swim.

When Kathleen was two and three, the Murphy Community School used to offer free swim on Friday night from seven-thirty to eight-thirty, which tallied nicely with my own schedule. After supper, Joan would get Kathleen into her bathing suit and put her clothes on over them, and put a bathing cap, a towel, and a clean pair of underpants into a plastic bag for her. (The clean pair of underpants is important: I think it was the idea of going to the pool that finally motivated Kathleen to become toilet-trained.)

At that age, Kathleen was sturdy, already competent, and heartfelt about everything she did. She would be tremendously excited by the prospect of going to the pool, but she brought to the preparations her particular gift for intense focus, so that you knew she was hearing every word of her instructions.

Even though the school is within walking distance, we'd take the car, because it would be cold by the time we were coming home, and Kathleen, for all her precocious competence, would be pretty wet. Park the car, into the school, and up the stairs, cautioning Kathleen not to run. (That was hard for her: She's always run everywhere. I really think she was running before she was walking; it didn't require the same degree of balance, just lots of momentum, which she had plenty of. Sometimes I'd watch her and sing to myself, rewording a song that was never very popular, "Long may you run; long may you run. Through all the changes that come. With your long blonde hai-ai-air, in the su-un; long may you run," The original song was about a car.)

I'd drop her at the girls' locker room. I never considered bringing her into the boys' locker room with me — not out of any sense of modesty, but because being on her own and doing for herself was so obviously an important part of the adventure for her. Final instructions at the door: "Put your clothes into a locker and close the door. Don't forget your bathing cap. Be careful on the stairs, they're very slippery. And whatever you do, don't go into the water until I get there." And then running into the boys' locker room and racing to get changed and showered and down the stairs before she did, because I never fully trusted her to stay out of the water if she had to wait any appreciable length of time.

If all went well, I'd be in the water a few seconds before she emerged from the door at the other end of the pool, her eyes big and shining with anticipation, even at the twenty-five yard distance, her bathing cap never quite straight. Never even close to straight. I wave to her until she spots me, and then she quickly picks her way the length of the pool, in a special, quick-stepping, stiff-legged, tiptoeing walk that may have been peculiar to Kathleen; or maybe it's common to very short, sturdy, very excited people, walking barefoot on hard surfaces in a great hurry. I steal a glance at the lifeguards, to see if they've spotted her, and I can see by their smiles that they have, they don't miss much. A few seconds later she's on the edge of the pool, motioning me to move back a little or come forward a little, and then she launches herself into the air, one knee raised, and she's in the water, and I've got her and she's laughing her marvelous infectious belly-laugh.

For the next hour, we have three basic activities. There's leaping, as described above, but with variations, as we increase the distance and she throws in a stroke or two. (Because this is where she learned to swim — not breathe, just swim. She didn't add breathing until she took swimming lessons — in that same pool, of course; but from the leaping, she got so she could cover a good twenty to twenty-five feet on one breath.)

A second activity is riding on my back. Kathleen puts her arms around my neck and I take a deep breath and push off mightily from the side, and try to breast-stroke the width of the pool on one breath (I've never really mastered breathing either, at least not with somebody on my back.) I justify this activity as giving her a sense of her own buoyancy, building her confidence in the water, but mainly we do it so I can get some exercise. She tolerates it.

The third activity is bouncing. I hold Kathleen in my arms and walk out to where the water is a little deeper. She is thrilled by the idea of deep water ("Now, don't let go of me, Daddy!"). When I've reached just the right depth, I start to bounce slowly up and down, holding her loosely enough so that her head never goes under.

By this time, the pool is filled with kids, and they are making a very impressive amount of noise. Whistles are blowing, kids are being ordered out of the water, kids are being told to stop running, being made to read the rules posted on the wall, being told to put the duckboards back where they found them. Kids are answering that they *found* the duckboards in the water. Kids are explaining why it might have *looked* like they were running. Kids are bumping into me in the water, wallowing past me, intent on doing physical harm to kids who wallowed past a second earlier.

I have never seen anybody hurt in the Murphy pool, except me, that time I played water-basketball, and in an ecstasy of leaping, forgot that there were *sides* to this particular body of water. And because I have never seen any of these kids get hurt, I know that these lifeguards must know exactly what they're doing. Still, I personally would be more comfortable amidst a more quiet form of discipline. I know that this is a failure in me, that it's Friday night, and these kids are having fun. That *I'm* the one who doesn't belong here. So to try get into the spirit of the occasion, or at least to tolerate the spirit of the occasion, I begin to sing as I bounce, a fragment of an Old David Bowie song: "Let the children boogie, let the children boogie, oh let the children boogie." Softly at first, then louder, as it becomes obvious that nobody can possibly hear me in this din.

"Kathleen, Daddy *has* to sing. And nobody can hear me anyway."

And this too becomes a regular feature of our Friday nights: bouncing and singing "Let the children boogie."

Why did we stop going to free swim? My schedule changed, the Murphy's schedule changed; I don't remember the exact reason. The truth is simply that I didn't treasure it enough. I was thinking about this the other day, and I started singing the song. Kathleen's younger sister, Annie, six, whom I've never taken to free swim, overheard me. She thought it was a silly song; and I suppose it is. And what does boogie mean? She wanted to know. I told her it means to dance a happy dance. I left it at that.

Oh, Annie. Boogie means so many things. It means to leap into water that's over your head, in the general direction of your father, long before you can swim. It means to put your arms around your father's neck and hold on for dear life as he pushes off mightily. It means to hang on to your father while he bounces up and down in deep water and sings a silly song. It even means to run where running is forbidden, to snatch a duckboard and hope that nobody will notice, to wallow around intent on mayhem. It's a very expressive word, Annie.

Kathleen is eight now. She doesn't need me to take her swimming any more. The last time I looked, she held a team record for her age-group in the Greater Boston Swim Club (which trains, of course, in that same Murphy pool). She hasn't mastered her racing dive yet, and in her first swim meet, she simply leapt into the water, one knee slightly raised. Everybody else thought it was because of a false start, that she was trying to hold herself back. I just laughed and sang softly to myself, a fragment from an old David Bowie song.



Chapter VII.

The Line Dancing Set

“Carousel” comes on after several other numbers. Everyone smiles and shuffles about. Graceful Marge Perry steps out with this line dance, leading these seniors with polish and panache. They know the steps and swing into motion. One man whoops with the music every time they swing their arms around.

Some months ago, several women whisper to me, Marge lost her husband, who used to be the caller and lead this line dancing. But she’s still coming, and now she’s leading. She does it with elegance and a definite step.

After “Carousel,” and several hushed consultations about whether now is the right time, refreshments are announced. Everyone has brought something and the table is covered with temptations: brownies, pineapple puffs (its maker insists that I try one; they’re terrific), tuna rolls, salads, cookies, and some nondescript soft-drink concoction that the whooper is cheerfully mixing. Surprisingly, it tastes good.

Someone asks Michael if he wants anything. He nods an answer. Michael is a handicapped young man who comes to the seniors’ line dancing and is well cared for by them. One of them brings him a heaping plateful and promises he can have more. Ellen Concannon, Program Supervisor at the Murphy, tells me they spoil him terribly. Also that he’s gotten so much better since he’s been coming.

I leave as the music strikes up again.

Kay Brown comes into the room talking: “I got 25 tickets for ‘42nd Street,’ and one of them is obstructed!” “I was treated like an old fish pedlar at City Hall.” She is a large, big-boned, talky woman, good-natured and welcoming, one of the women who run the Seniors program at Curtis Hall in Jamaica Plain. She tells me a lot about it:

- we have about 300 registered members.
- 15 come to knitting and crocheting.
- 40 come for line dancing (a big item in every seniors program).
- Spanish class had only two people last week, because it’s summer, so we’ll drop it until fall. People take Spanish because it’s the coming language here and if you don’t know it, it’s a problem.
- We take trips every month. In June we’re going to Allenhill Farm in New Hampshire; the bus is already filled and there’s a waiting list. In July we’re going to Riverside in Middleboro; the bus is half filled already. In August, we’re going to hear Pearl Bailey at the Melody Tent; 40 have signed up already.
- Now like last Friday, we had a belated Cuba Independence Day Party. We had an orchestra and a choir. Close to 100 people came. We served refreshments of all kinds.
- Our biggest problem is paying for buses. We have to charge the seniors for that. If someone can’t pay, we pitch in and take it out of our own pocket. We put in many a buck out of our own pockets, because we love it. We have a terrific group of seniors here. If you didn’t enjoy what you’re doing in your work, you wouldn’t be here.
- If they didn’t have the community school, they would sit home and look at the four walls. When my father retired, there was nothing. There was no place for him to go. Now there are senior shuttle buses to go to the doctors. The bus takes us to Stop and Shop and home, to the house. This driver we have now takes the bundles right up onto the kitchen table.

We are sitting in a large, light, high-ceilinged room in this elegant old municipal building. It is cool on a hot day. A quarter of the room is filled with a jumble of goods: the pre-schoolers' parents are about to have a yard sale. It was rained out last Saturday.

Olga Dumott, younger than Kay, but not by much, another of the women who run the Seniors program, busies about as we talk. She takes out a screwdriver and a pair of pliers to fix something, under the admiring glances of the other women. From time to time she adds to the conversation, mostly in measured, memorable phrases:

- of the Hispanic group that meets for a pot-luck supper on Fridays and which is gradually joining the largely white group in communal activities: "We're trying to bring the community to be a unified melting pot of all the different ethnic groups in the community, all nationalities, all races."
- on why people come: "We welcome people not as strangers, but as a family."
- "When you try to heal wounds, you must have good leaders."

Later, she tells me something of herself: I love to keep busy. I go to welfare and to court for Hispanics. I come from a ministry family; it's in the blood. My father was a Baptist minister, the son of a slave. He left the South and went to Cuba. My mother is Episcopalian. I'm Episcopalian. I came here direct from Cuba when I was 19. I know French, Spanish, and English, and I do a lot of work with refugees.

As Kay says, "Olga is unbelievable!!!"

We go upstairs to the Seniors room, a large, low room, windowed, with tables and chairs scrounged from here and there, a couple of old sofas, a kitchenette, and, as I am proudly shown, an extra-large ladies room that can serve the handicapped. People come here to get out of the house. They bring the paper in the morning, get a cup of coffee, and read it here. Ceramics work is in the metal lockers — they're already beginning Christmas things in June — and line dancing is set to begin. The caller calls the steps, the women move with assurance. One woman, who recently had a stroke, tries — she's game, but still a little unsteady, and sits down again.

The ladies continue talking, over and under the music. Olga tells me of her work with refugees. And I meet Mary Cover, who, like Kay, works part-time running this center. She tells me she is 82. "I always worked. I was lost when I retired; I had nothing to do. I lost weight! So I went to my priest, and said what am I going to do? He said go volunteer. After five years, they began to pay me—five dollars a week, and they gave me lunch!!!" Like everyone else here, she boasts about all they do for and with the seniors.



The art class is in session at the Ohrenberger. Ten seniors—seven women and three men—are hard at work, helped individually, in quiet, private discussion, by Morris Lane, a young man from the Museum of Fine Arts. Louis, 91, is the oldest. "It gives me something to do." Louis is painting a still-life—a cracked pitcher with flowers. He looks, and looks back, and looks, again and again; then he puts his brush to paper.



"It's interesting to see how different people approach the same topic," says one woman. Another: "I've been doing this for several years. You should see where I started. I couldn't draw a straight line." Another: "I can't get the folds." "I'm romanticizing rocks," says a man who is drawing boulders on a field, with no model. "The ocean looks like you could jump right into it," says another, who like many, is copying a print.

These people take their artwork seriously — they take it home and frame it — and after looking at what they are working on and what is displayed on the wall, I can see why. It is intricate, careful, impressive.

Later, Max Mills, a short, bald, active and verbal man who is Chairman of the Seniors, wrestles the conversation away from Joe Beth, himself no small potato here, President of the Council. He corners me in the storage room attached to the drop-in center, where, among other things, 20 men gather daily to play cards. He wants to tell me all about the program: "75 went to a restaurant last night on a bus; 70-80 people are going to the Catskills — *the* social event of the season; 325 will go to the installation of officers meeting on July 15, where we'll have a five-piece band for dancing. We play beano every week and give out groceries as prizes: macaroni, spaghetti, cake [he opens the cupboard and shows me]. We're going to a show on the Cape in July."

The words tumble out, as they have from Lou Alberts, former Chairman, and David Basil, and Joe Beth, all of whom are equally enthusiastic. I have already heard about ceramics and how 50 to 60 people show up for line dancing. These men bluster, and bustle, and tustle with each other. They get things done and they have a good time doing it.

Dot Gorman, Acting Coordinator at the Ohrenberger, explains some of the closeness I sense here at the monthly seniors meeting which some 150 to 200 attend: these people have lived all their lives together. Mostly Jewish, they moved as a group from the West End, when the neighborhood was torn down for urban renewal, to Dorchester and Mattapan, and from there to the Georgetown Project, which was built in 1973. Georgetown, attractive and comfortably situated on a hill on the edge of the Stony Brook Reservation, is within walking distance of the Ohrenberger. Some 75% of the people who live there are seniors, and they have made this community school their center.

Before the meeting, Max is taking money for one of the trips. Seniors line up in front of his table. Others sit at tables in the school's cafeteria—many women, as is usual in seniors programs, and a lot of men too, less usual. They wait. Max stands up and opens the meeting. The minutes are read, the slate is read ("the new slate is the old slate"), the financial report is read. And then they wait some more: the Mayor is coming today. Max hustles the various trips.

Mayor Flynn does come, surrounded by a certain whistle of excitement. He speaks for about five minutes, telling these people of upcoming legislation that will affect them, enlisting their support, assuring them of his support, both for the elderly and for the community schools. And then he walks around the room and shakes every person's hand, 150 of them. He drinks a cup of coffee and is gone. That he has come to this meeting is only one more piece of evidence that this, as Max and Joe and Dot have already told me, is a fantastic program.



Chapter VIII.

When You Need Someone To Talk To

The bright blue rug in Dave Gosnell's large, quiet office at the Agassiz dazzles the eye as you enter. A round table with several chairs is ready for a group; the bookcase behind it holds toys. Dave, tall, sandy-haired, relaxed, is at his desk. Sitting in the comfortable leather chair beside it, I could be a client — except that in this case Dave is doing the talking.

"People fear that we'll analyze them, get inside their brains, and get them to do what they don't want to do. I try to empower the client. I'm not going to make the decisions for them. I will give them different perspectives. I'll repeat back what I'm hearing so they can hear themselves. I'll help them see more clearly.

"I see a therapist as an outside resource, somebody who can bring an unbiased perspective. I try to be a neutral party, especially when working with families, where everybody wants you on their side.

"When people first come in, I don't jump right in and tell them what to do. I mostly just listen. I collect histories of the problem and of their lives. I look for patterns. Sometimes solutions come out in the history — past solutions that have worked, but that the person has forgotten.

"Sometimes it's easier to talk with someone you don't see every day. You can trust that what you say won't get out. It's kept in confidentiality. It's safe."

Deb Cahill, for a long time a counselor at the Condon, adds to what Dave has been saying: "A lot of people in the community schools do counseling. The basketball coach does a lot with the guys on the side; people who work in education and recreation do a lot of counseling. Someone says 'Go see Maryann to get help with your financial aid forms,' and she does a lot more than help with the financial aid forms.

"But here counseling is the main focus. We're interested in how people are feeling and how they're doing. We help people feel happier, more relaxed, and more in control of their lives.

"Mostly people can deal with the day-to-day in their lives. They have good support networks, people they turn to when they're having

a problem: a sister, a mother, a friend with a child the same age. They come to us when their usual solutions are not working. They don't come lightly.

"People always have options," Deb says. "We help them find options when they are feeling stuck."

Some 50% of the cases the community school counselors work with are referred by the Massachusetts Department of Social Services (DSS). These are the most difficult cases, often desperate situations in which people's lives have fallen apart on many levels—cases of broken homes, and child abuse and neglect, for example.

One counselor told me about one of these cases. "I see kids. I see a four year old now who's in foster care. Kevin is four; he has a younger brother who is two. DSS referred them to me because they had concerns about the mother. The father is not in the picture, and the mother has a history of abuse: she was abused by her own father when she was pregnant.

"I talked with the mother to find out what she wanted to do. This led to a home visit. Kevin was acting inappropriately: what he said didn't make sense, he used violent, aggressive images, he was talking to himself, he was anxious. I saw Kevin a few times.

"The family exploded. The mother agreed to place the children; she said she was doing a lot of drugs and couldn't care for the children. I helped make a plan. Now I am seeing Kevin individually to deal with the trauma of foster care. He feels really rejected by his mother. She's very hard to find. She disappears for periods of time; the phone is disconnected; she stays with relatives in other parts of Boston and doesn't let anybody know.

"When I see Kevin, we play. He takes the people figures and says 'This is Grandma. These are two little kids.' He can work out things that way."

It's a sad story of people in a pretty desperate situation. A lot of what the community schools' counselors deal with is sad. But not all of it is that grim. The counselors talk further about their work.

Dave Gosnell says, "I focus on families. Long-lasting change occurs. Before, I would work with an adolescent. He'd get to feeling better, but he'd be going back to the same situation. Six months later he'd be back to where he started. So now I work with the whole family.

"The idea of family therapy is that an adolescent's problems are not just his problems; they're the whole family's problems. For example, a kid is not going to school. His mother and father are fighting and everybody is afraid they will leave each other. So the kid thinks, 'If I don't go to school, they may focus on me and get away from the really scary stuff.' 90% of the time, it eventually gets back to the parents."

Pat Hunt, counselor at the Harborside, agrees. "A woman came in, for example. Her six year old was lying and stealing. The parents were in the midst of a separation. I talked with the parents and with the child and with them all together. It turned out that the mother needed counseling at that point more than the child did."

But, says Dave, "I don't want to leave the kids out. In one case, the parents made changes: now they go out together, they kiss each other. And the kids couldn't handle it, the change. They had been in the middle, some had sided with one parent, some with the other. Now they were squeezed out as the parents got together. So I saw the family as a whole for some meetings, and sometimes I saw the kids alone: no parents allowed! I had to educate the kids about the changes and let them know they would not be left out."

Deb Cahill continues. "A lot of counseling work is being supportive. It's helping people through hard times. For example, City Roots kids. When they start feeling shaky and are afraid they can't pass the GED exam, or won't get that job, the counselor is there to be patient, listen to their fears, and help them be steady.

"People need someone who can bear with them. You just need someone you can trust, where you can say 'God, I'm scared!'— someone who will tell you that you're a good person

and remind you of what you have accomplished. When you're down, you don't see what you have done so clearly.

"Sometimes people come because they're in the middle of a difficult situation at the moment. They're in school, for example; they've chosen to get a GED, or to go to City Roots, or to take a college course, and they're frightened and unsure of themselves. Or there's an illness in the family. We can't make **that** person well, but we can help hold **this** person together. Or they're living in a difficult environment. They may, for example, have a crazy neighbor who won't be evicted for some time, and they need help getting through that time.

"Or they may have lost someone, through death, or their best friend moved out of town, or they've moved and don't know anyone in their new neighborhood, or—and this is a biggie — their children are leaving home. That's a milestone in people's lives. It shakes up their identity: 'What am I going to do?'

"Sometimes someone is depressed or feeling low. They don't know what's getting them down and need help figuring out why they're depressed. Or someone comes in with 45 horror stories. There's little we can have a direct effect on, but we can help this person carve out a place for himself.

"Part of being supportive is providing a place to ventilate. Like for a single mother. There's no other adult at home, and there are several children. It's a big strain, a stressful situation. There's no one she can say to: 'You take them for a while. I need to get a way, or to be alone in the bathroom.' She can go to a counselor who will ask 'How was your day? How are you doing?' People save up their gripes for the counselor. And they get to see things in a new way: the counselor can show them they're doing a good job. The counselor can also brainstorm ideas with them, suggest, for example, that they exchange baby-sitting with a neighbor down the hall. People come to the counselor to get through the next 18 months until the kid is in first grade and they can change their life style.

"For some, a group is just as good — or better — than one-on-one counseling. We had a mom's group over in East Boston, a single mothers' support group. Its purpose was for people to get together to share ideas, compare notes, console one another, and be a resource



for one another. The women became friends and would call each other up during the week and see each other during the summer, when the group didn't run. One would be having trouble with her two year old, and the mother of a five year old would tell her what to do. It was a chance to make new friends. They lived alone with the babies, they were young. They shared with each other."

I can see, as I sit and talk with these counselors, why they all talk about a frequent lack of understanding of their program. Not only is counseling itself frightening and threatening to many people, it's not as flashy or visible as most community school programs. It's quiet; it's private; it takes place behind closed doors; it's confidential. Counselors can't rush out and talk about what they've been doing, as the staff in other programs can.

But their work isn't done only behind closed doors. Deb explains that they also act as consultants in the community school setting. "For example, a day care teacher comes up and says some kid is acting strange. We help the teacher know what to look for and put the pieces she is seeing together. We help monitor the situation

and give advice. We are also a source of information for others on the staff; we can find out for them how and where to get things done."

Dave Gosnell tells me that in his four years as a counselor in the community schools "I've done everything from public relations, to outreach, to therapy, to administration. It's been a growing process. I first started out at the Tynan. At the time, the school had a need for someone to work with adolescents. For example, in the summer they had Fun in the Sun. I taught martial arts, as a way to get closer to the kids. And I ran groups at City Roots. On a weekly basis we'd go in and lead a therapy support group. Another fellow and I worked with the boys. We also led coed groups and went on trips with the kids in conjunction with counseling."

The whole point of the outreach worker is to "be around" — to be there to support people and programs. They go on trips, meet community people, deal with housing problems, help the elderly with their problems. "For example," Dave continues, "a bunch of adolescents who are roaming around need some focus, some guidance, a positive role model. I'd hang out in the courtyard and shoot baskets with them. If there was trouble, I'd go out and they'd know who I was."

"Right now we have a person at Upham's Corner who spends time in recreation. He plays ping pong with the kids, and basketball. He approaches them on their level."

"It's a stepping stone for therapy or counseling down the line. A street worker may find there are lots of family problems. He can find better services for a mother: day care, food stamps, housing, or better housing; he can help her transfer a kid out of a school where he's getting into a lot of fights. Then he can hook the family up with a counselor."

"It works the other way too. The counselor can refer kids to the street worker to keep an eye on."

Behind those closed doors, in the community schools, and out in the streets, the community school counselors are helping an awful lot of people deal with the crises of their personal and family lives. They're helping them get through it all, find options when they're feeling stuck, and make a better life for themselves. And they do it for free. Anyone who is a resident of Boston can get private or group counseling through the Boston Community Schools.



Chapter IX.

Summertime Is For Kids

Click. Click. Click. Click.

“Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap. Eight on the right. Eight on the left. Toe-heel. Toe-heel. Toe-heel. Toe-heel. All right! Let’s do it again!”

Diane Walker, a dancer, upright, energetic, good humored, clicks her fingers in a loud and strong rhythm, making even the first simple toe taps exciting. About fifty 10 and 11 year old girls and boys are having their first lesson in tap-dancing. They bunch and spread out on one long black line in Madison Park’s enormous gym, as she stands before them and engages them with her smile and her rhythm and her upbeat stance. “All right! That was the first lesson. Everyone gets an A!” Diane Walker loves tap-dancing. Her whole body tells you that.

Every kid taps—sometimes with the left foot when it should be the right, but there’s very little stalling here. Even the very tall girl who came in looking for a confrontation does it secretly, when Diane isn’t looking. Even the boys—especially the boys—do it.

By the end of a half hour, they’re doing a routine. The whole line moves forward through tap, toe step, shuffle step, lunge! “All right! let’s do it once more.”

“C’mon over here. I’m going to tell you something about break-dancing.” They gather close around her and even the teen counselors are drawn from the bleachers. “Break-dancing is a lot like tap dancing. Tap dancers used to do it on the street. They’d gather and compete, do a routine, and then the next would take over, just like break-dancing now. Only they didn’t have music boxes; they had to make their own music—like this. (She breaks into a brief run of scat bebop.) That’s how they used to do it.”

A break-dancing circle forms and four boys take turns doing some pretty fancy stuff. The circle breaks up and the children line up to leave the gym. One boy throws his arms around Diane Walker’s neck and gives her a hug.

“This is called the airplane, crash landing.” Judi Blood lies on her back on the mat in the Jackson/Mann gym and supports each small child in turn in the air, with her feet to their stomachs. Some even remember to wave their

arms out, in a wobbly fashion. Then they tuck under and somersault over her head onto the mat. Carefully, she supports each child’s head.

The eleven 7 and 8 year old girls are learning a routine on the balance beam. Judi places each girl on a line to practice before she goes to the bar: kick, kick, squat, turn, V-sit, chasse, chasse, tuck jump off. Each one comes to the balance beam, as the others practice. She holds a hand, supporting. “Point your toes!” In one case, she uncurls the toes with her fingers.

“If you have done it and know it pretty well, what I’d like you to do is go over to the mat and do ten sit-ups while you’re waiting. When you’ve finished the sit-ups, climb up the bars and across and down.”

Judi Blood is steady and pleasant. She teaches gymnastics to these kids, some 200 of them each week, with patience and kindness and a sure competence. It’s a pleasure to watch her work.

“We have Christmas here today. Christmas trees, Santa Claus, everything! Next session it’s Easter. The last session, Halloween.”

We go down to the cafeteria at the West Roxbury Community School, and sure enough! There’s a Christmas tree in the corner, decorated and tinselled. “Rudolf” is playing on the record player and there are Christmas cookies with red and green frosting. Stockings (white cotton tube socks) are thrown on the table, opened, and each child clutches a treasure of some sort: jacks, stickers, a book. A paper fireplace has been scotch-taped to the wall.

The kids mill around—Christmas is about over—and swarm around me when they hear I’m there to write a book. They all want to have their names in it: Jimmy Thomas, David Erti, Michael Banks, Greg Banks, Eric Banks, Susan Wild, Bob Piemontese.... I can’t write fast enough.

Eleven or twelve Cambodian pre-teens lean over their desks, heads on bent arms, pencils on paper, concentrating intently on their English lesson. They're working on one of the toughest things to do in English: read three words, explain what they mean, and give the category.

One crayon, one pencil, one piece of chalk. What are they? Supplies. What do you do with a pencil? Write. What's a crayon? A color. Writing supplies.

A bowl, a saucer, a plate. A bowl is for? soup, rice. A plate? fish. Supplies for eating. What do you call them? dishes.

Rain, snow, clouds. Does it have to be cold for snow? No. Can you tell him what snow is? White flakes. Like ice.

Next door Betty is teaching four young Chinese children how to tell time. She turns the hand on a cardboard clock, and if the child gets it right, he gets to try to throw the ball into a basket. The team that gets the most baskets wins.

In another part of the partitioned open-classroom at the Quincy school, a foster grandmother is playing Scrabble with a teen-aged girl newly arrived in this country. She knows little English, but is too old to be put in with the beginners. So this Foster Grandparent does a lot of one-on-one work with her. She catches on quickly.

Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Chinese children, refugees and immigrants, study together in the Quincy's Youth English as a Second Language (YESL) program for newly arrived kids between the ages of 6 and 14.

"Typical children from China are from rural settings. [Paula McKay, Director of YESL, is talking.] Their parents have had rural jobs and they're used to having their parents around. When they come to Boston, both parents have to work, and their structure is gone. They have to stay in the apartment and they watch t.v.. As teens, they wander around, into the Combat Zone. There are a lot of teen gangs around Chinatown. It's not a healthy place for teens.

"If they are from Hong Kong or Vietnam, they have more affluent models. Their Chinese parents were the merchants in Vietnam. They come here and are very poor. They live in places that are not as nice as they have known. Their parents are not available and are facing a lot of financial problems. The time the parents spend with them is more stressed.

"Cambodian children have spent from three to five years in waiting camps, usually in Thailand. They have to wait for release to some country willing to take them, sometimes as families, sometimes not. They live with aunts and uncles, brothers, sisters—whoever gets here first. So there are teens who have never been to school. Their apartments are overcrowded, sometimes 12 people in three rooms...because Boston rents are so exorbitant. They hook up with other families. They live in Allston-Brighton, none in Chinatown. It's rough for them to come to Chinatown; there's a lot of prejudice.

"We have to bring them together. It doesn't happen overnight, or in the first three weeks. But by the end of the seven weeks, they are holding hands; they get together. At the beginning, there is a lot of misunderstanding.

"There's a big difference between the two groups of children, the Chinese and the Cambodians, in stress level. You can see it even in the pre- and post-testing. The Cambodians are more likely to show their feelings and frustrations, to cry, to over-react even because of what they have been through. We've come to expect that and we know how to deal with it.

"The newly arrived children are no problem. They are here to learn English. Education is pushed so greatly in the home. They don't want a vacation—they want to come to school and work."

They boast. They all boast, these coordinators and camp directors. They show off wood-working classes, art projects, dancing lessons, pools, pools, pools, cooking classes, educational projects, children making fuzzy pencils, painting murals, making head-dresses, playing basketball, playing monopoly and chess. They carry on. Each one has the best this and the most that.

Brian Connolly at the Condon is no exception. I learn from him about the South Boston Summer Collaborative—joint programs run by the Condon, the Tynan, the South Boston Neighborhood House, and the South Boston Boys and Girls Club. I learn about the Day Camp that takes kids on daily field trips, about the Fun in the Sun day-camp which mostly stays at the school and costs only \$5 for the whole summer, about the Tots program for little kids. I hear about teen trips, family trips, senior trips. I hear about summer softball leagues that play three games a night, starting at five and ending when the sun goes down, and about BNBL basketball



leagues. We sit in Brian's office and I hear all this. As usual, I'm impressed.

Gradually, I realize that that's all I hear. No piercing voices, no shrieks, no trampling feet pounding down halls. No kids, to speak of. I had seen a few in the cafeteria earlier, coloring and playing Othello. And as we walked about, I saw a few teens, who were stumped about how to get the sticky stuff off the walls ("Use Ajax," said Brian).

That's when I really learned about trips in the community schools' summer programs. All the programs have them. Most kids in the camps go off at least once a week on half and full-day excursions: to beaches, parks, museums, libraries.

Most of the trips are for summer fun—to get out of the building, out of the city. Some have a more serious agenda. At Madison Park, the kids visit the police, the library, WILD, the fire station, the court house. "Some kids in the area don't know that the Harriet Tubman House exists, on the corner of Columbia and Mass Ave." At the Quincy, Fridays' trips are for cultural orientation. The children go to stores and learn how to order things, to banks to see how banking works, to the library to get a library card and take out books.

But all the trips share an additional purpose. As John McCarthy at the Harborside tells me, "Upward Bound saved my life. I grew up in Dorchester and went to South Boston High School before busing. That program introduced me...it was, I would guess, 90% black. My counselors took us places we would never go to. That's what we do here. Take the kids places they would never go to. We open their eyes."

At the Condon that day, the Day Camp as usual was off—to the Stone Zoo. Fun in the Sun had gone off to Castle Island. And the tots were swimming in the pool in another part of the building.

A rare moment of peace in the summer.

Two little boys, Richard and Paul, sit at a table and read the book they've put together that morning. They're going into second grade and they come to the Agassiz twice a week for an hour to work with Ramona on reading. They're working on soft vowel sounds and, after rehearsing each one, spent most of today on the letter "a." They alternate reading the pages. "A is for apple" is easy. But with "Apples are good for you," it gets harder: halting assertions, a grubby finger pointing at each word, slowly, pressed hard. "What letter does it start with? what sound does 'g' make?"

A colorful quilt hangs in the hall at the Quincy, its squares filled with ice cream cones, a teddy bear, an apple, an owl, a tree and a flower, a house, a dragon. This is last year's joint art project, on which Chinese-American children worked with Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cambodian children.

This year's project will be a large photo mural, for which each child will draw imaginative extensions from one of his or her own photos. The pictures will be put together to form a large mural of life at the Quincy School. Getting these kids together is half the project.

Teens. What about teens?

I see them throughout the city, employed by ABCD and by the community schools. Programs for them reflect their own child/adult split directions. Again, the coordinators and the camp directors boast:

Jackson/Mann: "We have 18 junior counselors from ABCD and one from the Private Industry Council and four CIT's (Counselors in Training). They're all local kids, all from Allston-Brighton."

Madison Park: "Our counselors are local teen-agers and I meet with them for two sessions a day. I've tried to make sure the kids are first. Some of the counselors are 14 and 15; they are in fact kids themselves. At first they couldn't fathom that, that the kids are first. 'But what about me?' they asked.

"I tell the counselors it's important for the kids to feel they are somebody. Repetition on that is o.k.

"With the counselors I talk about not abusing power. I tell them 'You're only here because of the kids. Too many people use power to others' disadvantage. But we're all a family here. You are put in these positions not for power, but because the kids entrust you.'"

West Roxbury: "We have 50 kids. The CIT's are teens; the counselors are 18 and over; the senior counselors are in their 20's. Two have been with us since they were campers. They love it. They love to come back here. We have nine ABCD workers. Two are in the camp as CIT's; seven are doing maintenance in the building."

Condon: "25 teens are working here. It's a big effort. We do training; it's their first work experience. The 14 and 15 year olds are on the teen work crew: they paint, keep the baseball field clear of glass and rocks. An ABCD counselor is here all summer, directly supervising them, teaching them how to work. They learn how to do a good job: be on time, do what you have to do, get a pay check and a good recommendation or a job for next summer."

Harborside: "STEP 1 is for 10-13 year olds. They do recreation and education, field trips, substance abuse classes. They learn to swim and go to the BU sports camp in July. We're doing this in collaboration with Chelsea; they're all hispanic. In August we'll do community boating—they now can all swim—and substance abuse workshops on drugs and alcohol.

"STEP 2 is for 14-17 year olds. We hire the kids. They clean streets, paint day-care centers, clean Maverick Square.

"STEP 3 is for 13-19 year olds, nights—for the kids who work. We have dancing, art, drama, basketball, volleyball—and substance abuse."



All over: "We have 12 softball teams in two leagues, and 9 BNBL basketball teams with 12 on a team." "We have two basketball leagues. The pool is open after noon. The gym olympics will draw a crowd." "You can come back after 4, when camp is over, and use the pool."

Condon: "We're going to Riverside Park with the teens. We do two of these trips a year. It's the closest thing to Disney Land. We go at 10 in the morning and return at midnight. The list has been up for two days and we already have 90 kids.

"For the camping trips, we pick kids who've done exceptional jobs here. I'll go. The Director of Fun in the sun will go. And ten or twelve kids. We'll pick out a trip that will challenge the kids—do twelve miles on the week-end: three on Friday, six on Saturday, and leave three to hike out on Sunday. They work out well. Those high energy kids would get in trouble at the campsights. This tests their strength and ability.

"What you can accomplish on a week-end trip is more than you can accomplish in a whole summer. You're with the kids day and night. The kids open up. We're all in this together. We all have to get from here to there. If you're you want something to eat, you have to cook it."

The children are on the floor surrounding the teacher as she irons out the blue-gray mass between newspapers, and then removes it. They are making paper—and the chopped-up construction paper and peanut shells are in piles on the floor behind them. Bowls of mush are on the counter. Happily, the paper does hold together as she lifts it up, although it has a hole in it nobody understands.

Rest time for 7-10 year olds at Camp Joy, a Parks and Recreation program which runs in collaboration with some community schools, is rough. There's a lot of energy in these fifteen

special needs children—some retarded, some with emotional problems, some slow learners, some with downs syndrome, some with cerebral palsy, some autistic. They squirm, they jump up and down, they shoot off in one direction or another, or find a toy to play with—all while they are supposed to be lying down. There's one counselor for every three kids. They hold some kids in their laps, snuggle with others on the floor, speak sharply to others and are physically firm with them. It's not a restful time.

Group IV, the 18-38 year olds, has a wrap-up circle at the end of the week. Going down the list of campers—fully grown men and women—the counselors report on their behavior. Nearly everyone gets a star.

"Let's say goodbye to Michele. She has a job interview. We should all wish her luck. She has really helped out with Linda in Group I this week and last. Unbelievable."

"Jamie was excellent both days. He really stays with me, has a good attitude."

"We'd like to tell you about John Parker. He's been the biggest help to all the counselors. You can always count on him. He stuck by me both days."

"Anita is learning to keep her hands to herself. This is her first year at camp. She's come a long way."

"Frank shows a lot of maturity. Frank really helped me out. We all know who was the Cookie Monster yesterday. He got me into the costume, and then I was in the dark. He took me by the hand and led me out. He has a good cheerful attitude, none of that nonsense kind of attitude."

Sandy Hurley, the Camp Joy nurse, asks each small child to shake my hand and say hello as he or she walks out after rest time. They do, variously. Elina tells me how she spells her name.

"They're delightful. They're beautiful. They have so much to give."

Maybe 25 kids are playing in the gym at the Quincy, taking a break from their English lessons. At least five games are going on simultaneously, coexisting somehow in movement that might seem impossibly disordered—except it works. At one end twelve boys play an astonishingly hard and fast game of dodge ball, the ball whacking loud against the concrete walls as the boys twist and dodge, catch and hurl. At the other end, four older boys play basketball, dribbling elegantly, elaborately, almost never making a basket. In the middle, four girls play



volleyball without a net, punching the ball back and forth, and all around, with both fists. In and out another five girls briefly play tag, dodging everyone else's game. One girl on the side tosses a balloon up in the air, hitting and chasing it by herself.

Camp names: Kiowas, the Squirts, Treetops, Group 1. At Madison Park, they are "Frederick Douglass, for age 6; Sojourner Truth, for age 7; Mahalia Jackson; Crispus Attucks; Martin Luther King." The names are connected with the Black History lessons that camp director "Tiny" (he's a very tall man) Fernandez teaches. Each teen-aged counselor researches the famous character of his or her group. And at the end of the summer, each group will visit a place in Boston connected with that famous person.

Nine kids of about 8 or 9 huddle around the man sitting on the floor with a guitar by the open door at the Harborside. They begin to sing "Steve stole the cookie from the cookie jar. Who me? Yeah you. Couldn't be. Yeah you! Who stole the cookie from the cookie jar? Sam. Sam stole the cookie...." They chant. They shout "Yeah you!" The piercing voices of childhood echo for fifteen, for twenty, minutes through the big entrance room, the offices surrounding it, all the way across the parking lot. Clarion cries. Ecstatic repetition.



Chapter X.

How It Works

The Boston Community Schools program is a highly unusual partnership of the City of Boston and its neighborhoods. The City provides a base budget, facilities and maintenance, and technical assistance; and the neighborhoods, through Community School Councils, assess their own needs, design programs to meet these needs, and hire staff to run the programs. That is, the City provides the money and the space, and turns over the decisions about what the money will be used for to the communities.

Throughout the legal documents which establish the program, the emphasis over and over again is on the neighborhoods—on their empowerment and the importance of their role in decision making. The ordinance first “Empowering the Public Facilities Department to Conduct a Community School Program” in 1972 states that “community involvement in the decision-making process shall apply to every phase of the Community School Program.”

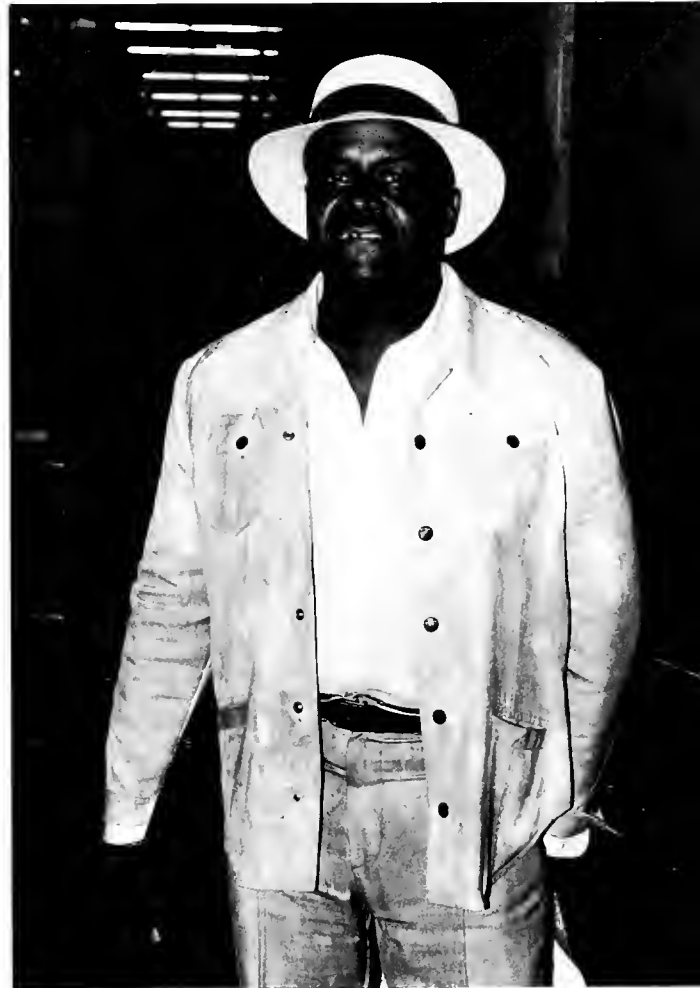
The goals of the program, as stated in the **Plan of Operations for the Boston Community Schools Program**, drawn up in 1974, read: “The purpose of the Boston Community School Program is to stimulate the development of local community school councils in order that they may address themselves to the identification of local needs and problems, and introduce educational, social, cultural, and recreational programs, and other procedures in response to those needs and problems.”

In the same vein, Community Schools Director Larry Dwyer recently stated that there are two goals for the community schools: service provision and political empowerment.

The role of the City, then, becomes one of a support system to enable neighborhoods more effectively to serve themselves.

How does such a partnership work? How has it managed to continue to empower the neighborhoods and to respond to changing neighborhood needs with changing programs for over twelve years, through fluctuating political and economic environments?

The answer lies in the **Plan of Operations**, a document put together in 1974. It outlines the rights and responsibilities of each of the participants in the community school system and provides for the checks and balances which have kept that system working.



The rules, simply stated, are:

1. The **Councils**, representative bodies of neighborhood residents, identify needs, set program goals and objectives, and implement, manage, and evaluate programs. They develop budgets and hire staff, maintain records and publicize their activities. Together with the Director of the Community Schools, they hire Coordinators. They are responsible for preparing Workplans each year, for submission to the Boston Community Schools Board and approval by the Director.
2. The **Administrative Coordinator** is hired by the Council, with the approval of the Director, to administer the program and to work on community, council, and program organization. He/she runs the community school for the council, recruiting staff, preparing budgets, fund raising, managing the building, implementing Council policies. He/she, as a City employee, is also responsible to the Central Office to act within the law, follow city-wide community school policies, share information as requested, and meet to discuss overall programmatic and policy matters.
3. The **Director of the Community Schools**, appointed by the Mayor with the approval of the Community School Board, heads the Community Schools Central Office, which acts as the agent of the City of Boston. This office has final administrative responsibility for the program, ensures the integrity and effectiveness of the program, and provides technical assistance. The Director approves individual community school budgets, workplans, and coordinators, and is responsible for seeing that Council elections are open, inclusive, and well-publicized. The Central Office provides technical assistance in legal and financial matters, program development and fund-raising, community organizing, workplan preparation, and public relations.



4. The **Boston Community School Board** is composed of a member from each of the local Councils. Its purpose is to provide a forum for discussion of general community school concerns, and to review and approve the Director's policies, the citywide budget before submission to the Mayor, all job positions in the community school office and some of the appointments to those jobs, the appointment of the Director. The Board reviews all workplans. And it acts as a grievance committee in the case of conflicts between a Council and the Central Office, having final decision authority in these cases.

These are the players and the rules. Their responsibilities are clearly outlined, the checks and balances of a city-neighborhood partnership in place. The dynamic tensions between City authority and local control are there too; the balance is a tricky, but, as it turns out, not altogether fragile, business. The balance of power has shifted from time to time over the last ten years, depending on needs and political, economic, and personal realities, as in any democratic institution composed of several bodies, each with real authority. But the community schools have survived these shifts and continue to serve the neighborhoods.

In flesh and blood, the strengths of this system become apparent—also some of the tensions. As Jules Slavet, Program Developer in the Central Office, concludes: "One of the good things about this program is there is so much dialogue it could kill you."

Neighborhoods and Councils

"The people are the program" has been the community school slogan since the schools first began; it is with the people that everything begins and ends in this outfit. Coordinators and Councilors talk about this:

"People feel like this is theirs. They can request programs and if we can do them, we will. They know this. They can join the Council and make decisions if they wish."

"The community is real vocal about what they want. There's no-one between you [the coordinator] and the community; they come barging right into the office.

"Originally the community schools were swim and gym. But as the needs in the community changed, or, rather, as they decided that their priorities changed, the programs changed. It was my job to take those needs and develop programs.

"When we go into a funding agency, we don't just go in and talk theoretically about wanting day-care. We bring in 2000 signatures."

"During the funding crisis in 1977, we packed City Hall. 500 people were there—senior citizens, pre-schoolers, people of all races."

"I'm part of the community, known in it. People know I'm not here to shuffle people around. We're here for them."

"People join the Council because they are interested in a particular thing. Then they develop a broader outlook."

"I joined the Council because I was always asking questions. I wanted answers."

"Two of our Council members are here all the time. Carolyn understands fully what goes on here. There are few secrets or closed-door meetings."

"The neighborhood knows what's best for themselves. People in government removed from the neighborhood don't always know. The community schools permit input into decision-making for and about themselves. Community participation is a major thing.

"The community actually sees those facilities as being theirs. They have learned how to get things done through the Councils, learned the political process. It has given them access to city government and some say in city services and how their tax money would be used."

This last point is one of the primary goals of the community schools: the political empowerment of people in the City of Boston, many of whom—for a variety of reasons—have felt deeply disenfranchised. People on Councils

learn to be politically sophisticated and to make government work for them. In fact, the purpose of the community schools, as stated in the **Plan of Operations** stresses the "development" of local community councils in order that they may build programs to serve their own needs.

The process of Council development and maintenance is not always easy. Some Councils now need bolstering: "There are 22 active on the Council. There used to be 32 seven years ago: as the money goes, so the people go." "My basic job this year is Council development.



City politics have a negative connotation, so people have backed off. They thought they would have no influence. We have to sell the program back to the community. There is no crisis now; people are apathetic, tired of meetings." "The thing we need to do is build our Council. It's hard to get people to come in and get involved in it. It started out as active, but as we have met their needs, they drop out; they got what they wanted."

But difficulties are part of any enterprise, especially one as complex as empowering a community. And the schools are on the upswing now. Indeed, some of the comments about why people have left councils paradoxically attest to the strength of the community schools: "There is no crisis now." "...we have met their needs."

Larry Dwyer and the coordinators are working hard to reestablish strong Councils where they have become weak over the difficult last few years. They are recruiting neighbors who will want to help build a strong organization in their community during a positive period of growth.

Coordinators and Staff

As Larry Dwyer, Director of the Community Schools, says: "City Government and the Councils are the two players; the real key to connecting them are the coordinators. The coordinators are the back-bone of the community schools. They make it work."

Who are these coordinators, and their staffs, the people who make the whole thing go? An extraordinary bunch, each very different, each shaping his or her school with a different flavor and different priorities, each working difficult long hours, pulling together a thousand pieces.

Dave Ziemba, Acting Coordinator of the Jamaica Plain Community School and usually the Program Developer, is a quiet man, probably in his late thirties. He was an economics major in college who worked first for Hostess Cupcakes, and moved out of that and into community organizing. When I first met him, he was rushing off to play basketball with some kids at the Agassiz who were mad because the rest of their league hadn't showed up. When I next met him, his young daughter was squirming on his lap while his wife swam at the Jamaica Plain Community School. Later that night we had a chance to talk.

"I've been here since 1979. I had been working at the Ashland Community Center, but I thought there was more of a need in the city, more of a challenge.

"I'm able to set limits on what I'm trying to accomplish. I've learned to delegate responsibility, to give people authority, making them responsible for the programs. They are empowered.

"I like community involvement and working with the Council to assess community needs—to empower the Council and facilitate a community organization. I don't try to change things overnight; I have a much longer term vision.

"The situation is constantly changing. It's appealing, always a different facet of what we're trying to do. It's never monotonous."

Pat Brainard, Coordinator of the Jackson/Mann, is a woman with a lot of energy and a clear sense of her position. We meet in her office on a wild day: six people are constantly in her outer office, talking, smoking, answering phones, laughing, eating; lines have formed outside the building in the hot sun, people waiting to get cheese and butter, which the school dispenses for the federal government.

"What I do best is work in this community. My main interest is Allston-Brighton. I know these people.

"I was born in Allston; my parents are in an elderly housing complex here now. It's an exciting place to stay. I like going to the supermarket and seeing people I know. My friends all left. I took a chance: my kids did well in Boston Latin and Boston Tech. I also had a kid stabbed in a racial incident. I know what it's like. One of the hardest thing I've done in this job was when I had to deal with a group of black women who didn't like a decision I had made. But we've worked out the differences.

"The people who work here are seen other places in Allston-Brighton. They're known. It wasn't always like that. It works. It makes people comfortable to be here. When I came, the staff was all from out of state; I was the token community person. We have filled slots with Allston-Brighton people.

"What makes it good also makes it hectic. Things have gotten more flexible as we have grown. In other places, the women in the office walk out at five no matter what is going on. No one here would leave someone in a turmoil. There's no such thing as 'not in my job description.' That makes for a nice feeling. People call it a family. It's not hard to come into.

"We share five people with the Boston Public Schools, the gym director and the teen person, for example. This shows respect for the program. We don't ask any more; we've paid our dues. We're here to stay."

John McCarthy, Coordinator at the Harbor-side, is a large, cheerful, talkative young man of 27. He grew up in Dorchester, but has moved recently to East Boston, a neighborhood he

loves. He went to UMass/Boston and studied acting. He came to the Harborside five years ago on the CETA program, expecting to stay for nine months. He's been there ever since.

"You can go out and develop a program—do the publicity, get a teacher, develop a curriculum. When you see people come in and excel, it's just really great. I like to provide courses that are beneficial.

"I work 60 hours a week, am down here week-ends. I don't have a chance to do anything else. People should be giving money to these programs—they work. They wouldn't understand how it is on a hot day in August and you have 300-400 kids in the building.

"In my neighborhood, there wasn't any place to go, unless you belonged to the Church. And if you went to public school, you couldn't do Catholic activities. This place is wide open for everybody.

"I want to be in a position to change something. East Boston has 44% adults without a high school diploma; lots of blue collar workers, underemployed people. This place is isolated: people won't leave East Boston, for work or for shopping."

Wyola Garrett, Coordinator at the Mattahunt, is lively, intelligent, engaging, and looks you right in the eye when she talks.

"I am a human service person. This started during deseg; there were so few of us out there that were rational. We tried to devise strategies so we would all act like human beings. Rumor, not problems, caused the problems. I wrote a proposal, my first proposal, for a Parents Info Center, to be staffed by parents of both colors. It worked well.

"That was a tough time at the info center. It was hard to keep the right perspective and keep it in the kids, when the media and everybody was so inflammatory. Yours was the voice of reason. It was hard for white women to stand with me and say this kid was wrong. We disagreed behind closed doors; outside we were united. In Hyde Park High School, we got black kids accepted on the cheering squads, and persuaded the coach that white kids could play basketball. There were five of us at the high school info center. Some kids said that having us there made the difference for them.

"That's when I decided I wanted to work with people. I went up to New Hampshire College and got a Human Services degree. Now I'm working on my Masters.

"I raised nine kids. I was working, but quit my job because I had to be home when my boys were nine, ten, and eleven. I did a lot of informal counseling before, opened drop-in centers. School simply legitimized what I had been doing all along.

"I would like to bring in a counselor. I like ongoing counseling, not just crisis intervention.

"I monitor and evaluate, but don't run programs. The folks who work here are so fantastic, I don't have to sit on top of anything."

Throughout our conversation on that hot June morning, the phone rings and Wyola tells people how to get what they want, whether it's at her school or not. I come by again at nine that night. She's still there, hotter, tired looking, but still working.

Dot Gorman is the Acting Coordinator at the Ohrenberger. She's middle-aged, pleasant-looking, competent, widely praised at the school. She doesn't talk much about herself, but always turns the conversation back to others. She does tell me: "I've been here nine years. I live in the neighborhood. The Community School needed a secretary and I got the job. I've been director for two years. It's a lot of work. Three people used to do what I do now. We couldn't replace them when they left because of budget cuts. This restricts what I can do.

"I have a wonderful, supportive staff. I was just out for a month in the hospital and everything ran smoothly."

Talking of the large seniors group at the Ohrenberger, she tells of the Foster Grandparents who live in Georgetown and work with the kids in summer camp: "There's something nice about having an older person with the kids."

Speaking of the program as a whole: "It really makes a difference in the quality of life. That's something you have to keep working on."

Janice Hamilton, Program Supervisor at the Jackson/Mann, and Sue Mechan, Program Developer, are another couple of live wires. Janice talks about "the versatility of it: yesterday we had the Elderly Olympics, for 200 people. We helped set it up. When it was over, the pre-schoolers came in, at the other end of the age scale.

"The principal of the school calls us up: they think there's someone on the roof and they fear he'll jump. They call the community school, because they know we've been up there before to hang a ten-foot sign. We went up there. No one was there.

"It's never dull, repetitious, boring. I love it. I worked in an insurance company from 8 to 4. I started here when my kids were small and were here in day-care. It's wonderful."

About the cheese program: "The first year we let them in before we were ready to hand it out. There was a riot; people broke the table and someone's finger. We had to call the police. Now people line up outside." In fact, as I see later, the cheese distribution goes smoothly, with a lot of work by a lot of staff. Lots and lots of people come for cheese and butter, mostly older people, mostly Russian immigrants.

Sue Mechan is young, blond, energetic, zooming. She knows everybody, does everything, has a sassy word for everybody in the place.

"I work here because it's an extension of grassroots stuff. What we have is because the community says it wants and needs it. It's diverse enough to serve a whole load of people.

"I want to see more programs for the taxpayer, the homeowners, to balance that with programs for new people in the community. Refugees are important; but what about the lifers? the middle classes in the community?"

Phrases from her conversation: "empowerment of people," "sense of ownership in the programs," "something that people can call their own."

Problems that interest her: How do you develop organizational systems that reflect increased size and remain sensitive to the community? How do you develop Councils so they work? get them to move from self-interest, which is why they join, to community interest? How do you develop respect for the community school in the community; how do you maintain it while you are growing? how do you try to meet all needs?

These sketches are few. Many people work in the community schools, and they're all different. But these people are representative of the intelligence and commitment and energy that one finds throughout this organization. They're an exciting team.

Citywide Board

The role of the Central Office is tricky. There's a very fine, often invisible, line between offering technical support and intruding, between being accountable for the City's money and taking away neighborhood control. Just how fine the line is became evident in a meeting I had with three members of the Citywide Board one evening.

These three people could not have been more different. They represented different ages, views, and parts of the city. Their disagreements were also representative and informative about what makes the community schools run so well.

Mark Urquhart is a young man, tough, intelligent, hard-working and committed, at times a little impatient. He'll let others talk, all right, but makes it clear that he doesn't agree with their views. He loves his community school, in Charlestown, and wished he could have the photograph of the school that hangs in the Central Office where we met. He settled for having his picture taken beside that photo.

Mark joined his Council a couple of years ago and is now a member of the Citywide Board. He has taken on the Chairmanship of the Finance Committee and is deeply involved in restructuring the budget process, making it more "open and accessible" and alleviating misinterpretation.

Mark is as enthusiastic about his work on the Board and about the Central Office as he is about Charlestown. He sees the Central Office as helping a lot; they're pulling things together that the local communities aren't doing—shame on them.

Mark sees and is part of making the new wave of energy and enthusiasm that the community schools are experiencing and will always need. He's right; the Central Office is doing those things. And he's right to be working so hard on these projects, because the community schools will work only if neighborhood people make them work. Mark is the forward thrust, the youth, of the organization.

Thelma Peters and Dave Gorman, equally committed to the community schools, nonetheless see the program with the experience and sometimes the exhaustion and disappointment of the past. Thelma played the important role of the watch dog in this trio; she mistrusts the Central Office and is jealous of the local community's authority.

Thelma Peters, representing the Mattahunt, has a long history in community organizing. As an involved resident of Columbia Point, long before the community schools existed, she says "people were active and involved. There was lots of participation. With Johnson's anti-poverty program, we began setting up APACs and governing councils and we began to explore educational programs." This, coupled with other initiatives, led eventually to the formation of the community schools. She was also part of the group that brought community control to the Headstart Program. She's been on the community school councils and the Citywide Board for a long time, and for a while was Chair of the Board.

So Thelma remembers the times a director has rejected a community choice for coordinator or a program, and wonders "how autonomous it is when you share with an appointee of the mayor interviews for who will be the local director."

She agrees with Mark that the new budget process is good. She doesn't agree that it's new. In her view, it's a return to the old ways, and she explains that the reason the "people out there didn't do it" is history. "We used to have a budget committee made up of community school representatives. They did a good job, but got discouraged when they were knocked down."

Thelma struck me as a good example of the checks in checks and balances. She makes very sure that the Director and the Central Office are not straying from the **Plan of Operations** and that the neighborhoods retain as much local control as possible.



I don't think that Dave Gorman would disagree with those goals. He is from the Ohrenberger. He too helped get the schools started and has been a long-time member of his Council and of the Citywide Board. He comes to this meeting from work, wearing a trim business suit. In contrast to Thelma, however, he emphasizes the amount of autonomy the neighborhoods do have and the uniqueness of this in the country. He and Thelma disagree, but they're each careful to listen to and acknowledge the other. They've worked with each other for a long time.

Generally, Dave's view is upbeat, tempered with memories of the past. He agrees that the strength of the **Plan of Operations** depends on the personality of the Director, which can lead to controversy within the Board and on the Councils, but thinks that Boston's community

schools still have "substantial" community control. He believes that political pressure can be brought to bear; *but* the local councils can direct programs, and how to pay for them, and who to hire exclusive of the coordinator. He also believes that since it is City money, the City must have some fiscal control over that money.

He says that the Board couldn't possibly control the Central Office: its members are not always in agreement with each other; it is composed of volunteers, who are not always politically astute and who are generally forgiving people and go along with the Director.

Dave is experienced but still enthusiastic: "There are an awful lot of dedicated people.... There is no other program in the country where the community can use public facilities, put in its own people, use city funds, and get outside funds."

For all their differences and disagreements, these three are all still hanging in there, working hard, with each other, to make the community schools work. "Basically, we want to bring services into every part of the city." Their debate and their different perspectives are a good part of what makes that happen.

Central Office

No one knows better than Larry Dwyer, Director of the Community Schools, how fine the line is between accountability and intrusion. Only recently he too was a coordinator, and whenever a memo came out of Central Office with a particular flavor, he was out the door and running over there to fight for his rights. He tries to keep this in mind in his new job.



He says that there's an inherent conflict in the structure only if you think bottom-up versus central administration. The two are manageable if you have the concept of a *partnership* (he uses that word many times in our discussion), as it was always meant to be. You have to have trust, respect, and integrity going in both directions.

The function of the Central Office, he says, is twofold: 1) Accountability. It represents the City government and the Mayor to ensure that programs are within the law; that Boston policy is adhered to in equal opportunity, affirmative action, and residency laws, for example; that local operations are using city money (also state, federal, and private money) legitimately. "This is my legal responsibility."

2) Provision of technical assistance and support. "Our job is to teach the schools how to write proposals; how to find funds and read foundation books; how to organize sports events. We help them if they are having trouble with other city departments getting services and we help set up accounting systems."

His goal is to put the entire community schools program back together after a rough few years, rebuilding managerial, fiscal, and communications structures. He wants it to be both a great community organization, "which it has never ceased to be," with programs for the neighborhoods, and a credible professional branch of city government. His aim is to institutionalize the community schools program so no mayor will ever be able to pull it apart.

"My biggest challenge: the Councils don't trust the City. They want to say they're on their own, to take the money and use it. The bottom line for me is service delivery and community development. Someone has to revitalize the idea of a responsible partnership, without political control. That's my job.

"A strong effective administration in this office gives a sense of the whole. They must see us as useful and see the appropriate role of city government in this."

This is an important point. The community schools are not a completely unrelated bunch of programs scattered across the city. They are separate and connected to their own neighborhoods, but they are also coordinated, through the Citywide Board—where Councilors from around the city meet and discover common concerns—and the Central Office.

"The Central Office is where people come together. It's the main place that happens," says Jules Slavet. A lot of that happens informally on Fridays—payday—when the coordinators converge on the Central Office at around noon to pick up the pay-checks for their schools. They stand and wait. They hang around. They talk—find out what's going on, who's doing what, what works, when someone else's summer camp began and when it ends, where you can get printing done cheap.

It also happens at the monthly meeting called by the Director, at which the coordinators and Central Office staff get together more formally to discuss their common concerns: management issues like budget-making, program development, relationships with the Boston School Department, special events.

Coordination—the harmony one notices among the programs throughout the twenty schools—also comes from the several programs that are

jointly funded and, often, jointly served by a person in the Central Office. The after school reading programs are an example: Ann Schiraga in the Central Office helps write grants, publishes a newsletter of helpful suggestions for parents of children in the program, and publicizes the program for the community schools participating in it. Jennifer Nourse provides the same kind of services for the community schools participating in the Occupational Literacy Program.

This work in the Central Office permits individual community schools to develop programs according to their own needs and at the same time allows for a city-wide similarity of purpose. It also means that individual program directors can give a good part of the fund-raising and publicity work to someone else, and focus more on their own program development.

The Central Office provides these, and more, services on a broad scale. Jules Slavet explains that people in the community schools call up with all kinds of questions: where can I get desks; I need money for this or that; the pool needs cleaning and we don't have a vacuum; I need a life-saving ring—and the one I just got doesn't have a rope; when can I get these walls built; how can I get this printed? "Michael Griffin called me up the other day because he wants to show films in his school, and the Boston Public Library catalogue costs \$20. He asked if I could get it for free — and because we are a city agency, I could."

Larry Dwyer's theme for the Central Office is "We deliver." "The coordinators," he says, "are the back-bone of the community schools. They make it work. I tell my staff here that they're accountable to us, but we wouldn't exist without them. We exist *because* of them. The function of the administration is to serve the direct service needs that exist. If it doesn't do that, it doesn't have a function at all."



Chapter XI.

Guerrilla War and The Second Boom

History is a lot more than a list of Milestones. It is people—acting and reacting, politically, socially, personally. And it is individuals' memories of people acting and reacting. Several of those who have been part of the community schools for a long time sat down with me and told me the community schools story—as they experienced it and as they remember it now. These are their stories, as funny, tough, political, personal, and different as they are themselves.

Mon O'Shea, now Executive Vice President of Bunker Hill Community College, was in at the very beginning of the Boston Community Schools, as a Council member in Charlestown and as a member of the Citywide Board. Trained in urban planning, his memories of the community schools revolve around organizational issues—who has what power, what kind of people were on the Councils and what kinds of decisions they made, what kind of organizational model the community school program is.

"I had just moved into Charlestown. All of a sudden a call was put out: the community schools were organizing and they were to be run by the community.

"The difficulty in the first few years was that the exceptions to community control weren't so clear. It was a constant question: who would hire the coordinators and the director? Who presents candidates to whom? the Mayor to the Citywide Board, or the Board to the Mayor?

"Peter Meade, the first Director, kept saying, 'You're going to run this. It's going to be yours!' But he wouldn't say what he meant by this; he didn't know.

"Then Peter Meade left, and all of a sudden there it was. How were we going to do it? We started to go through the process. Nobody wanted to tell us the limitations, the restrictions. We learned the hard way.

"I was always skeptical when Peter would say 'You're going to run this,' and I asked hard questions. I was afraid they would promise us X, Y, and Z, and then deliver only Z. In a way that's what happened. The truth lies somewhere between Peter Meade's promises and my skepticism.

"In 1974, the Mayor approved the by-laws (the **Plan of Operations**). For the Director, the Mayor selects and the Board has veto power; for the Coordinators, it's the opposite: the Councils select, and the Director has veto power.

"Let's face it. The Director is the Mayor's person. But overall the thing has worked pretty well. The appointments aren't as political as you might think."



Over and over again, Mon talked about how exciting it was to be a part of the community schools. "Here were neighborhood people coming together in the Citywide Board around important issues. They were just people, nice people, good people. There were white people, black people, Chinese. They got along well. They were fighting about how much power and money their schools would get. There wasn't anything in it for them — so people didn't get carried away with power plays. That was in 1972, 1973, 1974 — just before the whole business of desegregation hit the fan. It was a model of cooperation.

"These people gave tremendous time and effort. There were meetings in people's houses, all over the city. It got to be three and four nights a week, as we were developing sections of the by-laws."

He keeps returning to these people: "I was very impressed with some of the early people." "There were some *very* good people." "We had a great mix in some of these Councils." He remembers the mailman, the elderly woman with the bad leg from the housing project who worked hard for programs for the elderly, the first chair of the Citywide Board, who was "very, very dynamic." "It was a kind of grouping: nobody had any qualms about throwing their two cents in; but they loved each other when they left."

"It was revolutionary to be able to decide how to spend \$600.

"At the local Councils we were deciding how much money we would spend on swimming. How many ceramics classes we were going to run. And Council groups were wrestling with policy: how do you decide who can use the building? Can Joe have his bar mitzvah there? Can Mary be married there? Can people use alcohol in the community school? The policy that was set was that anyone could use the facility, as long as they booked in advance.

"Local people were making these decisions.

"Once a leftist group used the building. City Councillor Dapper O'Neill found out and announced that 'subversives' use the community schools. He came down and paraded in and out of our Council meeting. We paid no attention. We had to protect our right to decide.

"There was that constant little itch throughout the early days.

"In Charlestown, we developed programs for the elderly, which were lacking, and for exceptional children, which were also lacking. We devoted a substantial part of our budget to them. That was one of our goals: we wanted to do something that needed to be done.

"The model was unique in the country. In almost every other place, the community schools are associated with the public schools. Here it's not. That wasn't too popular with the School Committee here. It was a major decision to pull the two programs apart—a stroke of genius.



"The strength of the Boston system was in the local Councils. It was a marshalling of neighborhood forces to have some control over their lives—not a city agency apart from the schools.

"I'm enthusiastic because people talk a lot about decentralization of government, and I think this model was the smartest. It's not a perfect model, but the fact is that people today are making decisions about their neighborhoods that are important to them and that change the quality of their lives.

"I can't emphasize enough, that given all the talk of 'power to the people,' this is one of the shining examples of something happening that actually does that."

Thelma Peters and Dave Gorman also talked about the past, that night we were talking about the Citywide Board. They remember the formation of the schools.

Thelma says: "Before the community schools, I lived in Columbia Point. Politicians came down there to get attention. For example, Kevin White sat at our kitchen tables drinking coffee before he

became mayor. For example, Mrs. Hicks, who came uninvited and got her picture in the paper.

"We have always had programs at Columbia Point. Before the anti-poverty program of Johnson, people were active and involved. There was lots of participation. With the anti-poverty program, we began setting up APACs and governing councils. And we began to explore educational programs.

"Some of the first community schools started in the mid-west and New Jersey. We sent people there and talked with Kevin White about community education. It was many years before Kevin could get it going."

Dave agrees—"a lot of people were part of the planning process"—and adds: "City Councilors feared the community schools would be a vehicle for patronage. The Community School planning committee met with Kevin White and they came to an agreement, the **Plan of Operations**, which outlines City-Council prerogatives. It's remarkable. Councils would run themselves."

Larry Dwyer has worked at most jobs in the community schools, becoming Coordinator of the Condon, then Regional Coordinator for the Condon and the Tynan, and now, Director of the Community Schools. He's a political creature, and when he thinks of the history of this outfit, he thinks mostly about the two big battles for survival, in 1978 and in 1981, when the budget was cut. Talking with him is to hear a political history of Boston—as it relates to the community schools—over the last ten years.

The story that emerges is that after starting the community schools and a number of other neighborhood human services organizations, like the Little City Halls, during the first half of his tenure as Mayor, Kevin White—for a wide range of reasons—withdrawed his support in the second half.

As Larry puts it, "In '77 it hit the fan....White submitted a budget to the City Council with no money for the community schools. We organized; we bottled up City Council meetings. There was a 8-1 or 9-0 vote to send the budget back. We had about 500 people in City Hall: senior citizens, pre-school children, mixed races.

"In January 1981, we were three weeks away from shutting down, for lack of money. We went in and lobbied, but we were going to lose.

Then, at 10:30, the City Council broke for recess until 1:00. By 1:30 we had 200 to 250 people packed into the Chambers.

"The Assistant Mayor called us in to talk. All the government heavies, except the Mayor, were there. They said the money situation was tough. We said, Talk straight! You have a pay raise for department heads in the budget for over a million dollars. We're asking for \$500,000 to stay open until June. We were looking for half a million so we could retain outside funding sources far larger than that, so we could keep going.

"The end result was we were given enough to get through the end of the fiscal year. The next year they didn't bother to leave us off the budget; but they level funded us. At 53% of previous funding."



Ken Sinkiewicz, now Director of the South Boston Neighborhood House, was formerly a Tynan Council member, Tynan Coordinator, and, later, Director of the Community Schools. It is his view that "For much to most of its history, the community schools program was fighting a guerrilla war," and his memories reflect that view. They include the struggles—both internal and external—the sweetness, love, and loyalty, the wiliness and the grit that characterize many guerrilla operations.

He echoes Mon O'Shea's memories of the early debates over who would decide what, when the **Plan of Operations** was being set up; and like Larry Dwyer, he dwells on the political and the big battles for survival when the budget was cut. He tells a scandalous guerrilla story of a coordinator who established a working relationship with a principal by staging a theft that never happened, and then recovering the unstolen goods for the principal—transforming himself in the principal's eyes from an intruder appointed by the Mayor to an ally.

He also, like many others in the community schools, talks about his strong feelings for the organization: "Nobody who's ever been an integral part of the agency ever loses their love for it. The effect it has on you is greater than your effect on it."

His feelings for the community schools existed from the very beginning. "It was late 1973, and I was teaching at the time. To help out a friend, I ran for the community school Council, and the whole slate and I were elected by a landslide. 1100 people voted in South Boston when I was elected. I agreed to be Chair of the Council for three to six months, but that would be it, I said. At the first meeting, the program had an immediate narcotic effect on me—it was wonderful.

"Partly, I didn't believe that we seventeen people would actually have \$122,000 of city money to spend as we saw fit, within the confines of the law. Or that we could hire. I didn't believe Peter Meade, but it was true.

"White gave a lot of money to the community schools. When they were initially funded, after the LEAA, they were the highest funded non-public school agency in the country. He thought that to construct the new school houses for between three hundred and four hundred million dollars for only seven hours a day was not good. The Mayor's vision was to use them broadly. It was laudable that he saw the need to use them seventeen hours a day, not seven. It took real moxie to do that, and to do that outside the Boston Public Schools.

"When he signed off on the **Plan of Operations**, he gave away \$1.5 million and 120 staff positions to the neighborhood boards. His office had control over one position: the Director. The local community councils hire the staff.

"By the latter part of the summer of 1974, desegregation was on the way. In South Boston, a motion was made at the community school council to use the entire allotment of city money to set up an alternative school. Peter Meade had said we could spend the money as we wished, within the confines of the law.

"So we went to the Corporation Council of the City of Boston. We had to get out of this legally. Meade says spend the money as you wish, the Council says we want an alternative school. The Corporation Council established that we couldn't spend the money on an alternative school because city money was already being spent to educate the youth of the city. And we couldn't spend more city money for the same thing. That negated the community school council decision.

"People benefit directly from what the community schools do: single mothers can get out; 1500 people in South Boston have received diplomas. So few city dollars do that."

Rina Cutler, now Special Assistant to Larry Dwyer, formerly everything from day-care teacher to coordinator at the Hennigan, dwells more on the personal and the social when she thinks about the community schools. For her, much of the focus is on integration. She talks a lot, for example, about her own integration into the Hennigan Community School and the Bromley-Heath housing project which it serves.

"It was a strange first year for me: I'm in the middle of a black community, and then there's me. I was the only white on the staff. I started the day-care program.



"It was the kids that got me 'in'—to being a part of that community, that neighborhood. The first year was rough. There was a lot of reaction to me. Through the children I got to know brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, fathers, mothers. The point was those kids. I was still a kid too, 19 or 20, and the kids thought of me as a kid. We set up a wonderful relationship. I had a built-in family of several hundred.

"The Hennigan for those kids was home. I set it up: this is my house. This is how we act at my house. If you don't act right, we kick you out of here. Parents would laugh: the kids say they're going to Rina's house. It was a second home to them, because it had the recreation center, and athletics is real, real big; the gym, the pool, the programs were there. Even when there were no programs, the kids were there.



"It got to the point where I was as comfortable in Bromley-Heath as anywhere in the city, and as safe. An example of that is when, two or three years ago, I was at a christening at the project. When it was time to go, late at night, a mother asked a man to walk me to my car. He turned and said, 'Yeah. I need the protection.'"

And she talks about broader social integration—about programming, for example, to serve blacks, whites, and Hispanics, all of whom are in the larger Hennigan service area. And about cross-city programming:

"In the middle of busing, the Tynan came over to the Hennigan for a basketball game.

"We both had good teams and we both were looking for competition. I called the athletic director at the Tynan—I knew him—and said, let's have a game and let's have it here. I had meetings with the parents there and promised them their kids would be safe. I met with people here and made it clear no-one was going to screw it up. It took a couple of months to set up.

"They came over and it went beautifully. When the game was over, I got a wonderful letter from the Council at the Tynan.

"Now it wouldn't be unusual. Then it was quite a coup to pull it off."

The Second Boom

When people talk about the present or the future at the community schools, they invariably smile, sigh, mention the struggles of the past few years, and break out into some extravagantly euphoric statement.

Rina Cutler, for example, says, with her usual flair: "This is like welcome back to the promised land for us. In the neighborhoods you can tell. People had lost interest in a fight that had gone on eight years."

Ken Sinkiewicz, always the historian and political philosopher, puts it into perspective: "The community schools program managed to survive the entire period and is now in its second boom period."

"In crisis periods, the point is not to win. The essence is not to lose—to survive and carry forward your ideals until the climate improves for you. The climate is now."

Brian Connolly speaks of the same experience more modestly, more directly, but with equal power: "It's been a long road, but we feel that we're back."

Everyone talks the same way. One senses, at the community schools, a slow, sometimes incredulous movement out of the trenches. People seem to be coming up for air, breathing deeply, stretching, smiling, looking forward. They see good times ahead—growth, recognition, and a chance to consolidate and add to the programs they now have.

Many will tell you that one of the reasons the climate is now is Mayor Ray Flynn. The schools held together during the hard times, and managed not only to keep important programs going, but, in some cases, even to grow. Now the city has a Mayor whose own background includes time spent as a Council member in the community schools, and whose philosophy centers on neighborhood empowerment.

Already the amount of money the city budgets the community schools is back to what it was before the big cuts in the early 80's. And there are other signs of the second boom—the expansion of some programs, the strengthening of others, new, more liberal agreements with the Boston Public Schools. As Janice Hamilton told me, "Now the community schools program is the place to be. That's where things are happening."

The climate is now.



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